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Tetsukokoro

竜ノ湖太郎

Illustration  
ももこ

Last Embryo

問題児  
の帰還

# ラスト エンブリオ

角川  
スニーカー  
文庫

# Last Embryo - Volume 01

## Return of the Problem Child

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1

Tatsunokotaron

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# ラストエンブリオ

Last Embryo

1

問題児の帰還







—そして。  
その背中は、一陣の風と共に現れた。

# Last Embryo 1

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口絵・本文イラスト／ももこ

口絵・本文デザイン／百足屋ユウコ+ナカムラナナフシ  
(ムシカゴグラフィクス)

# Chapter 1

It was a fine day during the rainy season...

The aroma of spring died out from the city along with the Sakura petals, just the season where sprouts would grow out from the earth.

The sunlight that had been shot through the window was filled with warmth, surely a good day for a nap.

Within the orphanage reception room that was under such warmish sunshine, he – Saigou Homura, having shadows under his eyes, clenched his fists tightly.

“I.. I.. I did it! I finally did it, Suzuka...!!!”

“Thanks for the hard work, Homura. Looks like we will be able to spend a comfortable Golden Week.”

Tapping and putting the documents on the desk cheerfully was a girl – Ayazato Suzuka, who also returned an emotional nod. While both being fifteen years old, who could be called youngsters, Homura’s facial expression was that of someone who worked all night.

Saigou Homura then removed his self-made nekomimi headphones from his neck and released two buttons of his slightly oversized clothes. The reason why it is oversized could be due to putting in consideration to how much he would grow before purchasing it. Unfortunately, he didn’t grow as much as he thought he would in the end.

On the other hand, Ayazato Suzuka was dressed up slightly more fashionably than usual.

Her hair was adorned with a flower patterned hair clip that had been roughly tied on, and she was wearing a short pair of pants that emphasized the ease of movement. Although the casual jacket that she wore lacked the brilliance, it still reflected her own vitality and strong will and thus displaying her charm. For women who are struggling with their selection of clothes to wear, they must be

envious of her.

Satisfied with his work, a smile showed up on Saigou Homura's face.

"It's not that I am trying to brag, but this thesis is truly done with my utmost effort. With just these research results presented, the Everything Company shouldn't have any complaints about it."

"Nihaha, you're right. The clinical trial has already passed its verification, right?"

"Ah, yeah. The second trial has also passed at an exceptional speed. Although it seems that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Research Center used some kind of underhanded methods for it to pass."

After doing some small exercises, the two lied sloppily onto the sofa.

It couldn't be helped.

The curtains were shaken by the soft breeze, the lighting wasn't bad too. For people who have worked through the night, this weather was good to the point of being brutal. Additionally, with the protection of the house, no pain and no disaster. Forbidding someone to take a nap in such weather will be what one could call 'cruel'.

However, even though it was already noon, there was a surprising silence within the orphanage.

Considering it's daytime in a holiday, it should be a suitable time for it to be crowded with young girls and boys running around the small space they have. In the living room of this time, there should also be children who will be snatching to watch the 55" TV that was bought in a spurt. Despite so, just for today, the silence was enough to make the orphanage feel as if it was uninhabited.

In other words, saying that it was deserted wasn't an exaggeration.

It is possible that something had happened, an alarm sounded within his vague mind. However, as he was too sleepy, he decided to set his nap as his priority instead.

As Saigou Homura scratched his messy hair, he gazed towards Suzuka and projected a sudden and surprised voice.

“Speaking of which, today’s Suzuka... is dressed up quite unusually. Are you going out?”

“That’s right. I am planning to go to Shinjuku together with Aya-chan. Does Homura want to join in as well?”

“I’m not going. You and Ayato should go and enjoy yourselves.”

Homura rejected the offer with a wave of his hand.

He just burned the midnight oil just to finish the thesis for his Patron after all.

He finally finished it sometime ago, just before noon. Sleeping at noon or something like that was totally unlike a normal student routine. He wished to pass the first day of the Golden Week in peace at least.

And, as if trying to crush his humble desire, his guardian’s – Tokuteru Mikado’s voice came from the hallway.

“Homuraaaaaaa!!! The laboratory management report, where have you left it aaaaaaaat!!?”

“.....ah”

“.....eh?”

Oh no! – Homura was left speechless.

Suzuka’s voice sounded like she went crazy.

“...Hey, Brother. What is going on?” I won’t be angry. Quickly confess everything.”

“Sorry, Sister. If I don’t write the management report, the survival of the orphanage could be at risk.”

It was not only a research thesis that had to be reported to the patron of the research laboratory.

In addition to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Research Center equipment expenses, the operating expenses of “Canaria Family Home” Orphanage has to be summarized and reported. Aside from the Cryo Electron Microscope that was requested for

expanding the facility equipment, to conceal the fact that he had secretly bought a luxurious 55" TV, Homura's intervention was necessary as the representative.

An exaggerated description on the thesis, and to increase their budget.

Frankly speaking, it was falsification of information, but then again, the research itself already required a huge amount of funds. What's left is how would they deceive each other, as long as they could gain profits in the end.

Due to such conspiracy in place, in other words, the management report has not been written out yet.

Suzuka's face turned pale as hair stood on ends.

"Wha... What should we do Homura! When is the submission deadline!?"

"It is due at thirteen hours to be handed up along with the thesis."

"Uwaa, doesn't that mean you have only 1 hour left? How are you going to explain this to Aya-chan!?"

Suzuka let out a troubled scream as she held her head.

The patron's missy wished for it to be handed up by noon today. Will I make it in time if I start now? No, it is certainly too late. If I cannot think of any other options, the survival of both the orphanage and the research will be in danger.

Next to the rushing Suzuka, Saigou Homura was trying to come up with some solutions.

Looking at him, Suzuka regained her calmness a little and asked.

"So... Is there any other way, Brother?"

"No, it is game over, Sister."

"So fast! You are giving up too fast! Are there really no other ways?"

"Namo Amitabha"

"Praying to God for help!? You give up and it's the end of the game!? If we start immediately, we might make it!"

Ayazato Suzuka ran and took out some documents. Although her words and

actions were flustering, it seemed like she had properly made the arrangements.

While rolling up his sleeves, Homura, with a sigh, picked up his pen.

“Though, Ayato-ojousama to Shinjuku..... I think Roppongi or Ginza would suit her better.”

“That’s s not it. Even Aya-chan goes to places like the movie theaters and Kanokuniya Bookstore with us... No, this is not the time to speak about stuff like this! Well, well, write quickly write quickly! As long as you have the will, Homura could finish it in an hour!”

Yeah, yeah, Homura answered feebly and picked up the documents. Either way, he had to finish something. Ayato was an activist after all, once she knew that the report would be handed up late, she would certainly arrive immediately. Thus, we have to think of a good excuse before it develops into that situation.

Then, while thinking what sort of falsification should he come up with, in that moment — *PIPIPI* — a simple cellphone’s ringtone was heard.

Seeing the name displayed on the LCD screen, Homura frowned.

“.....Crap! It’s from Ojousama!”

“Woahh, are you serious?”

As the both of them were looking greatly perplexed, Homura answered the phone fearfully.

Subsequently, a gentle and quiet voice was projected from the phone.

“—Thank you for your hard work, Homura-senpai. May I take a bit of your time?”

“Why of course, Ojousama. On the matter of accounting management report, there is no problem. It will be finished and be handed up in exactly one hour from now just as plann—”

“This is far more important than that, Homura-Senpai. There are couple of things that I would like to ask you.”

Ayato interrupted Homura's words. Homura was a bit surprised from the voice and raised an eyebrow. Ever since they met her, there has never been a subject more important than fund raising. After all, she – Kudou Ayato's home state, was the patron of 'Canaria Family Home' where Homura and Suzuka live. Now, in Canaria Family Home, there are 78 boys and girls, not to mention food and other necessities of life, even school and sundry expenses are all provided by her home.

Therefore, expenses and related things were always the top priority that both of them agreed on. For her to skip over such top priority matter, it must be something that can't be delayed.

Homura also put on a serious expression and asked while puzzled.

"..... Ayato. Did something happen?"

"Uh, well. If I had to explain it, then I'd say that something really did happen, but it's not like I fully understood the situation, or should I say that what should have been impossible actually became possible..."

Ayato had vague idea and her voice seemed hesitant like she didn't know what to say next. Such behavior was rare from her. As the person who was always well-reasoned, this was the first time she had put on such a shameful display.

The said person was bewildered herself, she coughed to break the awkward atmosphere and continued talking.

"In other words..... Did anything strange happened around Senpai?"

"...eh,"

Eh? Homura was puzzled once again and tilted his neck. But it was no wonder.

To actually utter such words after being vexed for a short period of time, he could only make that response.

"By strange, what do you mean? Specifically, what kind of thing are you talking about?"

"Well... for example, have you received any letter in a strange way?"

"Letter? Err, you mean something like a written letter wrapped up in an

envelope?"

"Yes. If I was to give an example... it'd be something like a letter falling from the sky, or in a situation where it was a completely enclosed room, rather than a locked-room murder, it was a locked-room mail-like thing..... Or maybe, a Calico Cat bearing a letter for you....."

"....."

It's started to become more and more confusing.

As her voice gradually became small, she was probably ashamed of what she had said.

Sensing that kind of atmosphere there was on the other side of the phone, Homura suppressed himself from replying "What the hell are you saying?" out of kindness, and replied with worrisome while swallowing those words.

"Ayato. Could it possibly be..... A new punishment game?"

"No, it's good that nothing happened. Please forget what I said earlier."

"Mm, OK. After all, you do look busy. Speaking of which, weren't you and Suzuka planning to go out and have fun?"

"Yes, that is what I'm planning to do. Suzuka is an avid reader, so she's really knowledgeable about the books that even I'm not familiar with. I'll drop by Senpai's house today—"

She suddenly stopped talking. From sudden loss of words, Homura crooked his head a bit doubtfully.

The silence continued for a while.

Then suddenly, voice as sharp as a blade resounded.

"...Wait a second. Senpai, a while ago, what were you saying?"

"Eh?"

"I think I heard some gibberish with relation to the operation report..... Could it be, it's still not finished?"

"...Geh."

“Geh, what do you mean by ‘Geh’!? Isn’t it you who told me to wait because since it wasn’t data this time, you wanted to write it by hand!?”

“Namo Amitabha.”

“Begging God won’t let you finish the management!”

Ayato’s voice was unusually roughened because of how bad the situation was this time.

Homura clicked his tongue for this blunder while looking at the clock. It was about twelve hours now. Hurrying up, he should be able to make it by 13 hours.

Yet in other words, he would be in a trouble if she comes to take it before that. Since he hasn’t made preparations to fake the unaccounted expenses yet. There is a necessity to buy some time somehow.

However, she ignored Homura’s reply and said it flatly:

“...I was a fool to believe in Senpai!! Senpai, you are at home now, right?”

“Err... well, yeah... so what?”

“I understand. I will arrive there soon, and then we are going to have a talk concerning the future. ...Aah, that’s right. I would also love to hear the explanation about the recently bought luxurious items!”

*Please be prepared* – a call was cut with those dangerous words. At the same time, the sound of a car stopping outside of the orphanage was heard.

Indeed, truly a quick way to take action. He has long been prepared.

Homura frowned, and clicked his tongue the second time.

“.....Seriously? This is bad, Ayato-ojousama is coming!”

“Gah, what should we do!?”

“We could never just give it up like this!! I will be escaping with the documents, Suzuka, help me fight for some time! In an hour, see you at the same old place inside the shop!!!”

“I got it. I wish you luck!”

Homura raised a strange voice and quickly stood up. It was a situation where

every second counted. He took the documents in one hand, jumped out of the window and dashed in the courtyard while wearing slippers.

Given the situation, escaping from the main entrance was impossible. he planned to escape through the back door.

Foreseeing that action, Tokuteru Mikado drove his favorite car to the back door, and started shouting from inside.

“Really, each and every time, you never learn your lesson, do you!”

“Shut up! but nice timing, old man Mikado!”

“Stop calling me an old man! Hurry up and get in Homura!”

Homura quickly jumped into the back seat. At the same time, Tokuteru immediately stepped on the pedal.

With such unexpected acceleration, Homura hit his head and became a bit angry. But it was undeniable that he appeared just at the right time to give a helping hand. He held his head while thanking him quickly and picked up the management report.

While Tokuteru was driving slightly faster than the allowed speed limit, he asked Homura

“Geez, this really has become a usual event. Before long, you might lose the favor of Ojousama.”

“Don’t say that. Aren’t the cigarettes you love so much also included in expenses? I know about it, you use the name of the lab to buy dozens of those Mild Seven cigarettes.”

“What are you saying, that’s just a tip, a tip. Are there even clients who pay the employed mercenaries with money alone?”

Tokuteru laughed loudly without any embarrassment.

This man called Tokuteru was the orphanage manager in name, but in reality he was the free agent who traveled around the world. Although the title sounded questionable, he was a man who found Investors for the orphanage, looks like he had quite a big connections.

When they approached the red light, Homura turned his gaze towards the outside.

As it was the first day of Golden Week, the streets were crowded with students.

It was noticeable that they were walking around with everyday clothes.

“...That’s right. Five years has passed already, huh?”

“What?”

“It’s nothing. For the time being, let’s go to the usual coffee shop. I’ll quickly finish up the report by then”

“Got it. —By the way, Homura”

Tokuteru gazed at Homura through the car’s mirror and talked with a slightly stronger tone.

After a little hesitation, he asked with the usual voice.

“Recently, did anything strange occur around you?”

“—Huh?”

What? He asked in a surprised voice and stopped his hands.

“.....Err, strange in what way?”

“Let’s see. If I were to give some examples... did you receive a letter in a strange way? Like letter falling from the sky, or maybe finding it in a locked room that no one can enter, rather than a locked-room murder, it was a locked-room mail-like thing..... Or calico cat carrying a letter in its mouth, those types...”

“What the heck are you talking about?”

Homura replied instantly and started to doubt Tokuteru’s head.

When a 14 years old girl like Ayato said it, it could be passed as a cute and silly joke. But when an old guy, who’s in his latter 30s says it, it wouldn’t be amusing at all. Homura was about to ask if that joke was discussed with Ayato, but Tokuteru cut in.

“Nope, nothing. If nothing happened, just forget about it. I’m planning to stay at the orphanage for a week as I wanted to see the circumstances of it, so I’d appreciate it if you could help me tidy up the room.”

“.....”

He continued with a serious tone.

Looks like he was seriously worried about whether that “strange thing” had taken place.

Well, one way or the other, he is a guardian after all. No matter how strange it sounded, it would be good manners to give it a thought.

As Homura put aside the documents, he turned on a laptop. After opening the page of a comprehensive information website, he announced tardily.

“Old man Mikado”

“I told you to stop calling me an old man. I’m still only 36 years old”

“Yeah, yeah, Mikado-san. The mysterious matter you just mentioned about, or perhaps this is not what you are trying to say..... Currently in this world, a natural phenomenon that should not exist has occurred, you should have known this right?”

“As in?”

“It was often reported in the news right? Occurring in South America, there was a spread of a gigantic typhoon. “

“Gigantic typhoon? Aah, the one that will hit Tokyo soon? That typhoon?”

“Yeah that. Actually, that extra-large typhoon is full of scientifical impossibilities. —Look, it’s in the featured articles of this site”

As Homura said that, he began to read the news site’s contents out loud.

—The 24th Typhoon that broke out at the coastal waters of South America, after going North, crossing the Equator and heavily damaging some part of Europe, is now heading to East through Southeast Asia without showing signs of slowing down. The number of households affected by the damage are expected to be over 2 million.

This typhoon numbered 24, became known as “Cimarron<sup>[1]</sup>”, but due to its abnormal route and international threat, it was soon renamed to “Taurus<sup>[2]</sup>”.

It is estimated that it will hit Tokyo in the first half of Golden Week. Meteorological Agency addressed people to hold back from going out to distant places as much as possible. – Homura paused there.

“This is the hottest mysterious news that is happening now. –How is it? Do these serve as a reference, Mikado-san?”

“..... No, but it does have a great reference value on the other hand. But, what is so mysterious about that typhoon? Is the route impossible?”

“Hey, hey, what are you asking? The coastal waters of South America is on the Southern Hemisphere. Europe is on the Northern Hemisphere. In other words, this typhoon crossed the Equator which was not supposed to happen. Normally, a typhoon that broke out on that place should not be able to cross over the Equator, right?”

“Is it so? Absolutely?”

“Absolutely.”

An immediate reply came along with a strong nod. Tokureru still raised an eyebrow and looked a little doubtful.

“Sorry, I don’t really understand science much. Can you lecture me a little, Dr. Saigou?”

“All right, I’ll explain it briefly. This will be on the tests, so pay attention.”

After clearing his throat, Homura started a brief explanation of the currently happening mysterious phenomenon.

“In simple terms, there exists a natural rotation power or the so called Coriolis force – the force that moves the vortex. That works on Northern and Southern Hemispheres on a complete opposite directions, things like sea generated typhoon always have a fixed rotation direction. As a result, the typhoon does not occur on the Equator where there is no Coriolis force in the first place, and for a typhoon to pass through it is completely impossible.”

“.....Hou? So in other words, the power source is something other than

Nature, huh?"

"Even though it sounds unimaginable, it's not impossible... to begin with, ever since the breakout, this typhoon's been full of mysteries. Typhoons of Southern Hemisphere always have right rotation direction. But the breakout we are facing, Typhoon number 24 "Taurus" is rotating on the left. It's suspected that its origin is truly a power completely different from nature.

While deep in thought, Tokureru put his hand on a chin and the pupils of his eyes sharpened.

".....The development of climate weapons are internationally banned. Did anyone break it?"

"It's possible. On the internet, people are saying a certain country was experimenting with climate weapons... Personally, I thought the idea was good. The extent of its durability and the damage it caused, also the power that exceeds laws of natural world somehow feels like it has a will of its own. It looks man-made, or maybe... some kind of supernatural existence is involved."

"The power of God and the likes? Haa... those are not the words that a rookie researcher would say."

As Tokureru made fun of him, Homura smiled and shook his head.

"There is no such thing. It seems that those renown researchers and scholars hold faith as part of the cornerstone in their hearts. I can't flatly deny the God-like supernatural existences. Besides—"

For an instant, Homura's eyes had a distant look.

While looking at the sprout leaves, Homura muttered a few words.

"Besides, we, the children of Canaria house... aren't ordinary. If we talk about existence of unexplainable things, our existence itself is like a one big lump of mystery."

"...Yeah. It is indeed."

For a short while, there was only silence between them.

Both of them fell silent, but as the traffic light turned to green, Homura laughed while shaking his head.

“We strayed off topic, however that’s the only thing as mysterious as this case. Did that serve as the reference Mikado-san?”

“It did. It served as the reference in every way..... However, now I understand what you meant. In a situation if I don’t pass through a regular gate, that type of celestial beast might manifest like that.”

“What?”

“Nevermind, just talking to myself. But, to think that sort of thing was happening in the world. I heard about the giant typhoon approaching, but I didn’t think it was a typhoon with such strange trajectory. ...But why wasn’t I aware of such a thing? Wasn’t the place of the outbreak of the typhoon checked expressly?”

“Well, that. As a matter of fact, this typhoon has one more strange fact. The one that strengthens the rumor about climate weapons... Haven’t you heard anything about such a thing?”

“Hoho? That’s something new. Can I request another lecture?”

“You are diligent so all right. To tell you the truth, confidentially speaking, in regions where the typhoon passed through, a new type of virus was spread without exception.”

Tokureru was once again surprised and looked at Homura through the rearview mirror.

The title of Tokuteru Mikado is not just for show. Depending on the situation, it might be related to his actual business.

“The spreading of a new virus is not a serious matter, right? Was the cure found yet?”

“The existence of such cure has not been found yet. What’s more, this virus not only infects humans, but it infects plants as well. There will be no doubt that the prices of wheat and corn will skyrocket this year.”

These words were spoken with a joke-like tone, but truthfully this was an outrageously major incident. Starting from Europe coast to Southeast Asia, the scale of crop damage will reach unheard levels, Severe famine is to be

expected.

“.....I give up. If that’s true, then the extinction of humanity is only a matter of time, Dr. Saigou. So there’s no saving for us?”

“Of course, I’m calm like this because there is a way. So here’s the main point: for virus that has no cure, the sole solution is perhaps the thing we are researching, in other words, nanomachines.”

Oh? – Tokureru’s interest increased yet again.

“In other words, it will begin practical use? Aren’t there still trials?”

“They’re all cleared. This virus seems to be close to smallpox but the toxicity is stronger, and on top of that is its high proliferation rate, the disaster-stricken areas are also in urgent need of it. Thanks to that it passed the second phase of the examination with unthinkable speed. ...Well, Everything Company probably tried every measure behind the scene.”

Homura had a wide grin on his face.

—“Everything Company”, was the name of a company that appeared after the World War 2 and is counted in the top 5 trading Companies of the world.

It deals with the electronics as well as medical care, cosmetics and energy development on a large scale. But why did such world-famous large company invest in “Canaria Family Home” where Homura lives? Here’s the answer to that question:

Under the condition of transferring the technology that Homura’s father created, and the complete clarification of the sample, Everything Company settled in as the Patron of the orphanage.

“I see..... Well, there is a bit of a positive side in all this. With this, your dad’s research will finally see the light. I remember it was the latest model particle device... 3<sup>rd</sup> type Star particle body (3s Nano Machine Unit). The nanomachines your father created right?”

“That’s right, but i’m still unable to reproduce the complete sample. In the end, I only managed to reproduce one part of it’s potential. The current progress should be about 10%.”

“Ho? Then, is that 10% adapted to repel this new type of virus?”

“Not just that. I can’t say it clearly yet... But probably any existing virus, even intracerebral should be in its range. With a bit more progress, I think that it can even remove the cancer cells.”

Staring at Homura who was saying that it’s still not enough, Tokuteru’s widened his eyes in admiration.

“.....Seriously? That’s way too big of a medical revolution.”

“I think so too. But, the removal of cancer cells with nanomachines is a field that is being studied for a long time now. Even though I feel bad for saying this, but we are one step ahead..... having said that, that’s not really something to be exaggerated.”

“Why is that, that’s a rather amazing thing.”

To Tokuteru’s admiration, Homura shaked his head negatively.

“Don’t forget. Our purpose is not a medical revolution. It’s energy revolution. Even so, the complete nanomachine sample still has many unknown parts. Moreover—”

All of a sudden, Homura showed a self-deprecating smile.

“...Moreover, even though I reproduced that sample, truthfully I don’t understand the structure. The only thing I can grasp is the part of the outcome of its ability and its functions. Currently, I’m just drawing the approximate designs. If we had my deceased father’s thesis, there would have been even more progress.”

To that self-deprecation, Tokuteru returned a bitter smile.

These words had a very deep meaning. If someone heard them, they couldn’t help but to point out the contradiction.

However, Tokuteru shook his head and acted as if he didn’t hear anything.

“But still, isn’t that good? Going with essential procedures, starting from the passing of clinical test to spreading it, it would take a decade or two...”

“Exactly. Also, as the deal goes, if this achievement was to be recognized, I’m

gonna have a talk about loaning that latest model electron microscope I have always wanted. –Can you believe it? That a single microscope costs 2.5 billion yen?”

Tokuteru’s eyes opened wide in astonishment when he heard Homura say the amount of money.

“T-Two and a half billion!!? Hey, hey, a microscope that costs 2.5 billion... Does it have diamond lenses or what?”

“Heh. Mankind’s wisdom exceeds the value of diamonds. Even if it was just apparatus, the price won’t be cheap— Ah! Careful Tokuteruu!”

Homura suddenly shouted.

The moment car turned right to the alley, as if to block their way, a black luxurious car blocked the road ahead. From the event that was just a step away from becoming a traffic accident, both of them clicked the tongue.

At the moment they understood whose car that was, they looked up in the sky. ....That is to say, people who drives that kind of car in these neighborhood, undoubtedly, there was only one person.

“.....Hey Bakateru. We got caught, huh?”

“Sorry. I have forgotten that Prith has been hired as the chauffeur.”

Feeling dejected, Tokuteru vented his anger on the steering wheel.

From the driver’s seat of luxury car, a dark skinned, white-haired woman dressed in a suit came out and went to open the rear door.

Then a soft voice clear as bell was heard.

“.....Today has such a nice weather right, Senpai. Tokuteru-san. Who wouldn’t want to travel by car in such perfect weather.”

“\_\_”

The girl’s voice was as cool and calm like wind chimes.

There was no intonation in her voice, yet it sounded pleasant as it contained her unique intimacy. A peaceful smile surfaced on her face that further emphasized her lovely lips.

—But, her eyes were not smiling.

The emerald green pupils gazed quietly at Homura.

There isn't a man who wouldn't falter in front of her silent but powerful glare. While simply standing and quietly watching like this, it was honestly unbelievable that 14 years old girl was releasing such pressure. If visible anger could be measured, surely fury would fly up to the top.

—Kudou Ayato. She who is the daughter of Everything Company's president, also his junior in school and finally, Saigou Homura's employer.

That girl was so angry that it seemed that she would rush at Homura any moment now.

In front of his all-powerful master, Homura came out of car prepared for the worst.

“.....Greetings, Ayato-ojousama. One hour still hasn't passed.”

“I don't think the report that isn't completed now would be completed one hour later. There must be some kind of reason. ....Could you give an explanation for my listening?”



Her icy gaze was filled with pressure. The situation was already out of hand. It was impossible to deceive her no matter what reason you gave.

Then, it was time to be desperate. Better fight to the bitter and die honorably.

Homura looked up at the sky, then hit his forehead and bowed.

“I apologize deeply, Ayato-ojousama. I still haven’t calculated the funds that were secretly used to buy equipment for the orphanage. To be more specific, that’s the large TV in living room.”

“.....And?”

“This immoral person wanted everyone to feel at ease in the living room. For the sake of young ones’ smiling faces, I couldn’t help but to walk down the path of evil. Can the merciful Ojousama close an eye on this out of compassion? If you close an eye on this, count me as I will owe you two, no – three favors! Please, I’ll do whatever you want!”

Clashing hands together, Homura was earnestly requesting it. This kind of desperation was unusual for him.

After all, the Canaria Family Home was lacking entertainment facilities. After the lifespan of their long used 32” TV expired, the laughter in orphanage reduced significantly. Unable to watch that, Homura inevitably purchased the latest model 55” TV.

Aware of those circumstances, Ayato sighed a little.

“Three favors, right? But cheap tricks won’t be enough to deceive our company’s accounting department”

“.....Is it no use?”

“Or rather, the accounting department won’t waver no matter the amount you owed. It’s the most stubborn department after all. .....So, I will pay that loan with my own pocket money.”

What did you say? Homura raised his face.

Ayato smiled mischievously at Homura, then put her hand to waist and turned around to the dark-skinned female chauffeur.

“Prith. About Canaria Family Home’s equipment, think of it as a personal gift from me. Although the price is not low, compared to the three favors that Senpai owes me, it would be considered cheap.”

“Hey, wait,”

“As you wish, Ojousama”

The dark-skinned woman called Prith, quickly snatched the management report from Homura and put it inside the car’s trunk.

“Well then, come with me. For the exchange of one favor, you will be escorting me and Suzuka today. Is that alright, Senpai?”

Ayato clapped on the seat. One misfortune after another. To gain a favor by loaning money, as one would expect from from worldwide famous Everything Company’s daughter. A splendid usury.

It can’t be helped given the situation.

Homura looked up for the third time and a bitter smile floated on his face.

“.....Roger. Doing that in exchange would be a cheap price to pay.”

“Indeed. .....Also, while feeling a little sorry for Senpai, I have decided to live in the orphanage for a while starting today. I’ll be grateful if you could arrange a room for me”

Ha?! Homura looked at Ayato, then at Tokuteru.

He just said the same thing as well, perhaps it’ll become popular?

“I don’t mind, but starting from today Tokuteru is also planning to stay in, and because of that there are no available rooms”

“? I remember there is one room that is not used isn’t there? Is that room not available too?”

“Aah, no, but that room is..... Well, forget it.”

Homura consented while scratching his head embarrassingly.

After Homura got inside the car, the sunlight suddenly dimmed down.

“.....Huh? That arrived way too fast”

Typhoon #link24 was predicted to arrive at Tokyo at night. No matter how you thought about it, it's way too early, although that was what Homura thought, but it was common for the meteorological agency predictions to be off the mark by half a day.

Yet Tokuteru Mikado, was looking at the weather with eyes full of unease.

“.....This is unusual.”

“The weather would be becoming bad, wouldn’t it?”

“Ah, it is going to be terrible. So after you return home, don’t go out tonight.”

Saying just that, Tokuteru drove his beloved car and rushed somewhere.

Homura also remembered to get home as soon as possible, and went to accompany Kudou Ayato and Ayazato Suzuka on their shopping later on.

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**1** Wild Bull. It’s also the name of [three typhoon](#), “cimarron” refers to a [Philippine wild ox](#) and was given as a name for typhoon. Cimarron is from the Filipino simaron meaning wild/unruly so the Wild Bull/Ox is more like a savage Bull/Ox. You see why they put it for a typhoon... ↪

**2** The Bull of Heaven. Read [Taurus \(History and Myth\)](#), the bull is quite “important” in all myth. Anyway, it has pretty much always been seen as a Bull. (GU4.AN.NA). ↪

## Chapter 2

Few hours later.

A fierce storm had fallen upon the beautiful scenery.

The weather following the storm clouds turned into a heavy rain that even dimmed vision, created waves along the coasts, and furthermore, it even flooded the mountain rivers. The flooded rivers brought forth a muddy stream that could even swallow the town downstream, creating an illusion as if a dragon had appeared.

Livestock residing on the riverside were washed away together with fences and disappeared in the water without a trace.

Due to the sudden change, the wild beasts ran away in chaos. However, as if the thunder clouds had wills of their own, lightning fell down on the running animals one by one as they squirmed in havoc.

It was a manifestation of a raging storm which created an illusion making one wonder if earth had turned to hell.

However, amidst that raging storm, a figure of a man gallantly pushing his way forward was seen.

*(This.....This is beyond imagination...!)*

Clad in a coat for enduring the rain and wind and pushing his way towards the center, he – Mikado Tokuteru, ignored the storm that was mowing down and blowing against him, glaring towards the center of the storm.

As if deciding to aim at Tokureru, it tried striking him, but none of its attacks hit him. In front of such scene that anyone would shake in fear, Tokureru's pace hadn't slowed down even for a bit.

But, that was only natural. To begin with, this man was not afraid of the storm.

He was calmly pushing his way towards the center of the raging storm.

As if it was responding to his fighting spirit, a roar of a bull was heard from somewhere.

Lightning traveled on the ground within the dimmed visibility. The originator of this unnatural storm, in front of his long awaited challenger, decided to stop hiding its appearance.

『GEEYAAAAaaa—!!』

The cumulonimbus started morphing. Its shape had changed to that of a cloven-hoofed animal, then a pair of majestic horns of lightning extended as if they were piercing the heavens.

It's full length was already beyond measuring.

After all, the opponent was the cumulonimbus itself.

The cumulonimbus cloud which was the vortex of raging storm, turned into a bull warrior that was clad in lighting. Although its body was without a substance, with one step of those gigantic hooves formed by the cumulonimbus cloud, the whole ground trembled and cracks appeared. The cracks mowed down the trees, and pavements of the roads were cruelly destroyed.

This shape, it was exactly shaped like a beast of constellation from the myths.

Before that heavenly bull that would even make the war gods and deities stare in fear, Tokuteru was glaring at that overbearing form without a trace of fright.

Raising a bull-like roar, the bull of the cumulonimbus cloud was about to charge with vigor.

*(Well well.....This troublesome guy has finally appeared. At this point, its growth speed is already beyond that of the original Gugalanna.<sup>[1]</sup> How long can the current me last against it.....!!?)*

In front of the cumulonimbus cloud that was wriggling as if it was alive, Mikado Tokuteru started preparing for a fight. It was not an illusion, from his whole body, a faint glow similar to lightning could be seen.

Looking at that, the cumulonimbus bull's growls became more and more violent.

The power of the storm grew even stronger, and it started landing on Tokyo.

\*

—Saigou Homura, Ayazato Suzuka, Kudou Ayato - around the time when the three of them had a light meal and finished watching the latest remake of a movie after returning from Kanokuniya<sup>[2]</sup> bookstore.

The weather had already started to become stormy.

Once it turned dark and they had returned to the orphanage, the windy rain that blew thunderously and mowed down everything, was hitting the windows, and it became a situation where the house was being flooded from the gaps all around it. Witnessing the falling branches of the tree that was outside the gate, the possibility that things would fly in from the outside couldn't be overlooked.

The children were devising a plan so that the fragments won't scatter around even if the windows were to be broken. Saigou Homura, Ayazato Suzuka and Kudou Ayato were also running around to assist them with it.

After getting exhausted from taking measures against the typhoon and having a light dinner, unconsciously, bitter smiles floated on them.

Homura turned the TV on for some information about the typhoon.

“Good grief, what a terrible start for the Golden Week. This is especially one of the worse ones in recent years”

“For real! The flower beds and trees are in a complete mess, they need to be re-planted! The emergency rations were also completely destroyed!”

“.....That aloe was edible, right, Suzuka?”

Homura was watching news about the typhoon while Suzuka grieved over the annihilation of their edible plants.

Ayato stood up while carrying her emptied tea cup. She was probably headed to get another cup of tea. While looking at her leaving figure, Homura, for some reason, asked Suzuka a question.

“Speaking of which, this has been on my mind for a while. Why does Ayato speaks only to Suzuka without honorifics?”

“Ah? Well, that’s... I told her, ‘We are both in the student council, right? Since we are always together in school, being all formal would be bothersome!’ using the authority as the president of the student council.”

“I see. That’s just like Suzuka’s style”

Ayazato Suzuka and Kudou Ayato were members of the student council. Unbelievable as it may have seemed, Suzuka, since the first year of middle school, was acting as the president of the student council for three years and played a good role in it. It was because she wasn’t shy and could quickly open up to anyone.

“At this rate, the animal cabins of the school’s dietary education department might be in danger.....”

“Yeah, that reminds me, the institute’s laboratory and industry university were doing some kind of collaboration”

Homura muttered as if he remembered something.

The school that the three of them attended, the Houei Private University’s Associated Academy, is a large escalator type private affiliated school. Inside the university, there were grade school, middle school, and high school buildings, with each department owning a sports field. Although it was the leading prestigious school in the neighborhood, Everything Company was also involved with it and provided support for research to Homura through it.

The youths of the orphanage were only required to pass the middle school examination and were waived tuition. Even if they failed, they are still able to take an admission exam for middle and high school. These conditions were what Homura got from Everything Company in exchange for giving them a part of the rights for the patent for nanomachines that his father was studying.

Thus, the industry-academic cooperation referred to the joint research that high and middle school students carried out together with academy laboratory and Everything Company. The private Houei University being the leading affiliated school in Japan, from the start, was performing the education to raise the outlook of the world from childhood by doing an industry-academic cooperation starting from middle school.

Homura as someone who has the qualification to enter in and out of Houei University's research centre, and Ayazato Suzuka as the Student Council President of the middle school, have contributed to various industry-academic cooperation ideas like stock-farming.

The dietary education department mentioned now was one of them. It was not unrelated to Homura's research of Nanomachines.

"If the livestock escaped, it would be troublesome for the people in school. What was bred again?"

"Lets see, 10 chickens and 5 piglets. If they are raised well, they are expected to become delicious smoked hams and sausages. Although we have reinforced the breeding cabins..... they could not account for such a heavy storm. The cabins might have been blown away. Can I go and confirm it?"

"Okay. I'll be guiding Ayato to her room. Please return as fast as possible"

"Okay!" answered Suzuka and she dashed out. The moment she took a turn at the corridor corner, her footsteps vanished.

".....Such laziness. At least walk from corridor to the entrance."

Letting a girl go out in the storm alone might be considered as something that should never be done, but if it's about her specifically, then there was no need for concern. She was particularly special in this orphanage.

Homura also stood up and went toward the kitchen to see Ayato.

"Ayato. It's about time I guided you to your room."

"Ah, okay. It's that room right?"

"Right. Well, it might be a bit inconvenient given that it's a boy room. Pardon me on that..... Oh, sorry. I got mail."

Hearing a faint ringtone, Homura opened his phone.

It might be a little impolite to do it in front of someone, but the ring sounded from the phone was used to get in contact with the members of the laboratory. Even the laboratory had a holiday in the Golden Week, so he had to consider that there was some kind of urgent task coming up because of the storm.

However, the mail address that was displayed has never been seen before.

*(Queen.Hallowe'en@ne.jp.....What the hell is this? Is this a spam mail or something?)*

He tilted his head while making fun in his heart.

—However, this message was too suspicious.

In the first place, as it was mentioned earlier, leaving aside the lab members, no one should have this mobile's mail address, except Ayato and Tokuteru. It's possible that the mail contained a malicious virus that would leak private information.

He would be forever ashamed If he was caught by a typical virus like a Trojan Horse. Homura shook his head and closed the phone.

“Senpai. Was it an important mail?”

“Sorry, it was just a spam. Now, come with me, I'll guide you.”

Homura left the mail as it was and continued guiding Ayato to the room.

The windows at the corridor were still shaking. This was also because of the aging of the window frames. If an earthquake was to come someday, it might not hold out.

It was about time to think about repairs. With such thoughts in mind, Homura quickly walked through the corridor.

Arriving to the room in question, Homura took out the key while talking about the owner of the room who was not there anymore.

“It's the room of the absent owner, but don't mind it and use it as you wish. That person hasn't made any plans to come back anyway.”

“What do you mean?”

“From the start, that person only stayed here occasionally. The last time he came back was five years ago, after that he never returned..... Good grief, I wonder where and what is he doing right now.”

While showing a bitter smile, he opened the door with a key and vaguely spoke about the circumstances.

—The foundation of this orphanage “Canaria Family Home” that Saigou Homura lived in, was connected to a single woman and a boy.

One of them was a woman called Canaria with unknown nationality.

With unknown funds and connections that came from god knows where, she, in a blink of an eye, managed to get more than ten investors and established this private orphanage, and made a foundation so that youths living under it could have a proper education, and she alone managed all this.

However, the female founder Canaria, fell to an illness and passed away five years ago. While it was uncertain if that was an excuse, many of the investors quit all at once.

Then there was another boy, who suddenly disappeared five years ago in the middle of a Golden Week. Where he is or what he's doing, there wasn't anything heard from him at all.

It's said that spring is the season of encounters, but it's the opposite for Homura and Suzuka.

This season, changing from late spring to early summer, was the season full of partings with important people.

“So that's how it was..... I did not know that there were people like that in this orphanage. I certainly thought Senpai was the eldest one.”

“Right now, I'm truly the eldest. That person would be an adult by now, and he is probably living as he pleases outside of this county.”

“.....Have you ever considered that he might be dead?”

“Of course I haven't. Well, come in.”

Ayato was urged to enter a room of the absent owner.

She was expecting a dusty room, but was stunned to see that it looked no less cleaner and tidier than all other rooms.

“.....Senpai? This room hasn't been used for 5 years right?”

“That's right. But well, it was cleaned together with all other rooms when doing major cleanups. Mildew might start growing after all”

“But, the room owner’s whereabouts are unknown right?”

“He is missing, but it’s not like he died or anything, after all, he’s not someone to die on the roadside like that. He can suddenly return right? And at that time, if he finds his luggage to be missing and makes a racket about it, it would be troublesome. Although, he’s always been an eloquent and bothersome guy.”

However, it’s still troublesome. Just come and take the luggages already, said Homura bluntly.

After showing more and more surprised expression, she looked at Homura while floating a mischievous smile as if she has understood something.

“.....I see. Senpai and Suzuka, really liked that Onii-san quite a lot right?

“How did you get to that conclusion”

“I can only think so. To take care of a room for a missing person, my goodness, that’s normally impossible. What’s more, it was five years ago when he disappeared, both of you were still 10 years old at that time, right? Thinking carefully, to care for for someone that you got separated with when you were a just child, If it’s not a family love, it would be impossible.”

Homura unhappily put the key on the desk. Despite Homura’s dissatisfaction, Suzuka truly held the owner of this room very deeply in her heart. So he was unable to strongly deny it.

At this moment, he saw the Nekomimi Headphone on the desk. Homura took it in his hand and rotated it a few times while smiling wryly.

“.....Well, I certainly didn’t hate him. Even if I have no idea where he is and what he’s doing, but..... well, he is ridiculously strong person. I think there is no way he’d drop dead at some place.”

“Strong you say?”

“Yeah. “Of course, and I’m talking about the physical strength.”

“Ph-Physical?”

“Yeah. That person was the most special among us. He was not a person who would seclude himself in a single place.”

“Is that so?” Ayato absentmindedly answered.

But it couldn’t be helped. In modern society, what did it mean to be strong physically?

Not to mention that this was not a topic for a girl like Ayato to understand.

Especially since the scale of his power couldn’t be understood without meeting with him.

“Speaking of which, Senpai. That, what’s the matter with Suzuka? Is she still preparing countermeasures for typhoon?”

“Ah, if it’s about her, she went towards the school. She seems to be worried about the animals of the dietary education department, so she went to see what’s the situation right now.”

“Eh?” Ayato raised her voice as she looked back.

“.....Senpai. What did you just say?”

“Huh? I said Suzuka went towards school,”

“You let her go alone!? In this heavy storm!?”

Ayato raised her voice.

However, that was a natural response to it.

With such heavy rain, the street flumes were flooded and the water had reached the ankles. The wind blew with such powerful force that it blew away pots and house signs. Lightnings roared every minute, not to mention that there were also several lightning strikes. A blackout wouldn’t be surprising to happen any time now.

By no means was it a situation to let a girl go outside alone.

But Homura was not panicking at all, and instead scratched his head, while considering how to explain it.

“Uh..... I get what you are trying to say, but there will be no problem if it’s her. Look, you should also know about it. Everyone in this orphanage is fundamentally special. Even among them, Suzuka is special. There is no need for concern—”

Suddenly, a roar that seemed to split the veil of darkness resounded in the orphanage.

At first, they were under the delusion that it was thunder, however, as the house was shaking a little, they immediately guessed that this was a sound of an explosion.

“The explosion just now..... It came from the side of the school.”

“Tokuteru-san? Where is Tokuteru-san right now!?”

As if driven by the extreme feelings of unease, Ayato grasped Homura’s hand.

Homura got confused for a moment but immediately collected himself and took out the phone. If it’s him, there’s a high chance that he might know something.

“He left for an urgent business, but the weather now is horrendous. So he shouldn’t have gone too far. The call should be connected soon”

“Oh, oh no...! Suzuka is in danger!!!”

Just as she said that, Ayato ran straight towards the entrance.

As Homura called Tokuteru, he chased after her back, however Ayato’s leg strength wasn’t normal. By the time Homura crossed the corridor, Ayato had already opened the door and rushed outside.

Homura hung up the phone which couldn’t connect to Tokuteru at all and smacked his lips strongly.

“Shit, what was she thinking, that Ayato-Ojousama!”

Homura thought about the final words she left behind.

—Both Ayato’s and Tokuteru’s behavior was strange ever since the morning.

They both seemed to be alerted about some unidentified thing, but it seemed that their objectives were different from each other. Ayato probably became careless thinking if it was a normal situation, Tokuteru would’ve been able to deal with it alone.

Without a doubt, the two of them must be hiding something.

Homura took the raincoat at the entrance, and hurriedly ran after Ayato and

Suzuka.

\*

— In front of the main gates of Houei Private University's associated Academy.

Outside, the storm was heavier than expected.

The Transportation systems were completely paralyzed, not to mention the cars, not a single person was to be seen. The rain drainage systems were also overloaded with the precipitation such that it exceeded the capacity of the systems while the water rushed from the shoes all the way up to the ankles.

Both his legs felt heavy as he ran due to the surging water, but it was not the time to be concerned of that matter.

Homura, running while panting heavily, finally arrived in front of the school gate after all the trouble.

*(The breeding cabins should be beside the school. It would be good if the animals for dietary education are being kept in there as well.)*

It was midnight after all, so the security guards had already returned home for today. However, as one would expect, the main gate was impassable.

In the middle of a heavy storm, Homura went to the school's back door.

Trees that were properly arranged inside the school also swayed by the storm and scattered it's buds.

In spite of the heavy storm and the possibility of getting swept away by it, Homura found his way to the breeding cabins— but suddenly, the sound of a beast enjoying eating its prey was heard.

*(.....What was that sound just now.)*

It was a very disturbing sound.

It's not the sound of the rainfall. It's definitely not the relaxing sound the rain makes.

If an example was to be given, it sounded like someone biting a moist half-roasted meat, however, the sound kept resounding without getting erased by

the sounds of the fierce rain.

After hearing such disturbing sound, Homura's wariness strengthened. Slowly, he continued approached without making sounds, and he looked towards the breeding cabin from the shadow of the school building.

Then, a huge shadow of a person whose size could cover a cabin moved slowly.

(!/?)

Homura desperately suppressed his voice from surprise. Not raising a loud voice was a good move. Or maybe it was the sound of the heavy rainfall that has saved him. If he was a normal student, then he would without a doubt fall into a state of panic.

The giant humanoid shadow Homura saw was shocking to that degree.

『Gya.....Gya.....!!!』

It was the voice of a monster that was indulged in devouring the livestock.

The monster with a huge build bit into the back of a piglet and crushed 5 chickens with one hand. The illumination was broken so the appearance of that figure could not be seen clearly, but without a doubt it was three times the size of a human. Although it was standing on his two legs, the balance of the body was distorted, and it looked like its tough upper body was supported by the thinner lower body.

It was obvious that such shape wouldn't be able to support its upper body weight.

*(Oi oi... This is way too unexpected.)*

Homura observed the monster with a big frame from the shadows.

It was too dark to be seen clearly, but two horns could be seen from its head. The shape of the head above its neck was clearly derived from a human.

*(That type of horn and cattle ears..... a bull monster? Is it possible that it escaped from some laboratory?)*

He soundlessly took a picture.

Although it was the normal reasoning, it could only be thought like this.

If Ayato and Tokuteru were vigilant about such monster, their ambiguity before would be understandable. Homura thought his reasoning was flexible, but no matter how you think about it, the existence of such monster was unthinkable.

On the other side, the monster had been displaying a strange conduct of eating and vomiting the livestock. That was obviously not an act to satisfy its appetite. It's possible that it is an instinctive conduct.

As he watched the monster's figure, Homura decided to get in contact with Tokuteru and opened the phone's contacts.

At that moment, footsteps were heard from the other side of the cabin.

Homura raised his face with surprise.

Together with sensing the human presence, a high-pitched metallic sound reverberated.

“—!!?”

Despite of the heavy rain, sparks were flying in front of his eyes.

Although Homura couldn't tell by the sound, the number of steel exchanges was six. It was an instant clash of offence and defense, but it was more than enough to decide victory and loss.

The giant monster kneeled down as his blood gushed out from his legs.

While Homura could not understand what just happened, a human figure was blown to his hands and that elevated his level of surprise.

“Ayato.....!? Just what are you doing!!?”

“T-That's my line..... W-Why is Senpai also..!!!”

“That's because you rushed out of course! I had already said that nothing would happen to Suzuka.....!!!”

Ayato wanted to retort back, but she couldn't continue and started coughing.

“.....So..... pathetic. I never thought that I'd grew so dull that I could not handle a mere 10 exchanges.”

Ayato was writhing in pain, and lost her consciousness. Looking closely, there was a severe laceration on her flank. From the depth of her injury, Homura immediately guessed that she lost her consciousness from the shock that came from bleeding.

If the wound reached the internal organs, it was in immediate need for an operation.

Luckily, the giant monster's legs were also injured. It might be possible to escape now.

"Hold on till the laboratory! If we get there, we can take emergency treatments!"

He desperately called out to her despite being aware that she had lost consciousness. The fact that there was no reaction from her displayed the danger she was in.

Homura carried Ayato on his back, and ran towards the school building.

However, the monster was not so generous as to overlook that defenseless back.

『GEEYAAAAaaa——！！！』

The roar not understandable by human language spread throughout the neighborhood. At this point, it already rivaled a sonic weapon. The tattered breeding cabin completely turned around and was blown off, cracks appeared in the school building and shattered windows were flying everywhere. Homura who was separated from it was also blown off by the shock along with the sprayed water. Luckily, the heavy rain and the tightly put on hood of the raincoat proved fortunate. If it happened a bit closer, the ear drums would've been crushed without a doubt.

As Homura fell down with the momentum, Ayato groaned from the vibrancy.

"Ugh.....!"

"I am sorry, please hold on a bit longer!"

Despite still covered in mud, Homura stood up while carrying Ayato.

While standing up, he took in consideration that it would be bad if mud got in

her wound, but their companion wouldn't allow them so much composure. Finding a chance when he fell, the huge monster rushed towards Homura despite being limp. With just one step, the water took a form of a crater and was pushed aside, and that situation was nothing but a threat.

Despite the fact that the injury on its leg was by no means light, it still dashed like a tank. Homura immediately rushed towards the nearest school door and smashed the window to open the lock. With that fellow's stature, entering the school building would be impossible.

As soon as Homura went inside a school, he leaned on the wall and adjusted his breathing. Even though Ayato was a girl, he still ran while burdened with a person. It was no way lighter than manual work. To run in one go from here to the laboratory, it was necessary to adjust his breathing.

—But, he was too naive.

Suddenly, tremors similar to an earthquake assaulted the two of them.

『GEEYYAAAAaaaa— ! ! ! 』

A violent roar. The vibration spread. The equipment was broken and started flying around making an optical illusion as if an avalanche of rocks hit the entrance. What was even surprising, was the fact that the monster stuck its head inside the building from the entrance to examine it.

Despite getting his shoulder stucked due to his oversized figure, the huge monster waved his arm and crushed the pillars that were supporting the school like a rock drilling machine.

With a single swing of it's arm which was stronger than a crane, all the cupboards were blown and the debris went flying above Homura's head.

“Shit, this guy is crazy!”

He protected Ayato from the flying fragments. Despite getting hit by a fist sized fragment, aside from the bleeding forehead, there were no other injuries. The action he took was certainly good.

However, there was no time for relief. That giant build could possibly destroy the school to move forward. Though the reasons for not doing that were not

known, Homura had one hypothesis.

*(It's not just dumb. It has the behavior that disregards the surroundings to catch humans? What's more, this shape similar to human and bull combination..... isn't it just like a perfect Minotaur?)*

Homura wiped his sweats and stared at the bull's head.

Minotaur —— A half-human, half-beast monster that appears in Greek mythology. Homura was not aware of the details, but it was supposed to be a bull monster that ate people that were thrown into a labyrinth as a sacrifice.

This was not a labyrinth, but getting chased by a Minotaur in a school wrapped in a storm was definitely a bad taste for an escaping game.

If the Minotaur was left like this, the chances of not escaping were high.

Homura quickly confirmed the situation, raised his head, and looked at the emergency equipment for calamities installed on the wall. In case of fire or earthquake disasters, if you enter a special code according to the situation and pull down the lever next to it, it can activate protective measures against that calamity.

*(Calamity emergency equipment..... Fire extinguishing gas is harmless against living things, so using it is useless. ....No wait, if this equipment is the same as the ones in laboratory then.....!!!)*

Different from fire, natural disaster, and earthquake, there was another security code for another calamity. If that equipment was inside the school, it might be possible to get away.

There was no time to hesitate. While crawling, the monster was gradually destroying the entrance. Homura removed the equipment's protection cover, put in the security code and grabbed the lever.

“Please move.....!!!”

With a heavy sound, Homura pulled down the lever. At that moment, a dull sound that was like a drop of an iron hammer was heard within the school.

Homura who understood that it went just like he wanted, turned his back on Minotaur and ran towards the laboratory. Seeing that back, Minotaur started

crawling and pushing forward in a straight line within the school building.

It was a habit to chase the fleeing humans after all. Strengthening his confidence, Homura jumped towards the hallway that continued to another school building.

Homura believed that it would catch up immediately, but it seemed that the previous leg injury was still effective. It was crawling with both hands for that very reason. The Minotaur pursued inside the school just like a centipede. The Minotaur kept crawling while fallen, however, the moment it crawled to the hallway—a huge iron plate fell on its neck.

『GYa ! ! ?』

Rather than pain, that scream was probably more from the shock and surprise. Just as Minotaur thrust its arm inside the classroom, the bulkhead pierced through its body looking as if it was isolating the classroom.

“It entered perfectly.....! How is it you bull beast! A 500mm thick special bulkhead pierced to the base of the neck! It’s not easy to escape isn’t it!”

Homura raised his small fist declaring victory and escaped from the emergency exit next to the security shutter that only opened from inside. The emergency exit would be closed by the barrier soon.

In just a minute, the whole building was surrounded by barriers.

With a hazy consciousness, Ayato muttered as she saw the school changing into an iron casket.

“.....That was, surprising. To think our school had such a function.....”

“Right. The Houei large laboratory, along with nanomachines, are also studying particular microbes, like extinct viruses such as smallpox in secret. This is equipment for a biohazard that might be caused from that research.”

That’s right—this was not a system for prevention of fire or natural disasters, but to restrain the damage of man-made disasters. No one would ever think that this iron coffin would be used to lock up the Minotaur.

Homura lent his shoulder to Ayato once again and turned his back at school.

“If we go to the 3rd research center, we will be able to get an emergency aid.

After that, we'll call the ambulance and the talk comes after that. Okay?"

".....Okay. But, umm, how about Suzuka.....?"

"Just as I said before, that girl would be fine. I feel sorry for being silent, but different from an imitation like me, Suzuka is a genuine psychic. Even if by some chance she was left behind in the school, that girl will be fine. Rather, we would be holding her back—"

At that moment, the ground shook violently.

In the sky raised a roar from the thunder clouds.

Saigou Homura's eyes were stolen from the dazzling light in his vision, and he stopped thinking for an instant.

Instead of calling it lightening, it would be better to call it flashing of heat. The heat wave emitted from it instantly erased the rain and wind and brought silence to the surroundings.

That light source that just fell down from the sky — pierced through the iron coffin that was covered by the 500mm specially composed armor easily as if it were cotton and sunk into the ground.

(.....!?)

The iron coffin was burning brightly. Cracks ran in the ground.

Homura was at loss for words from the supernatural event that was happening in front of him. To be able to tear the specially composed armor that could withstand not only a tank's cannon but also a ship's guns was more than surprising, but what was truly surprising was not that.

It was a single great battle axe that fell to the ground as if spewed from the cumulonimbus cloud.

Homura's eyes were stolen by the brilliance of that battle axe.

It's not that it had any majestic ornaments on it. All that battle axe had was a single ruby gem inserted in the center. It was also hard to say if the molding was practical, that giant battle axe was not fit for the human's hands. It was impossible to lift it without the help several people.

Although it was a rough and extremely large battle axe—its edge shone dazzlingly just like a sun. Even though it was inside the burning flames of the school building, the battle axe's shine was still seen perfectly. Even for an amateur like Homura, that battle axe looked especially threatening. The Minotaur and the storm could not be compared to the threat of this battle axe.

The battle axe that emitted divinity enough to give chills was raised up by the Minotaur that had just come out of the flames. That scene crossed beyond the level of just making it stronger than it was. The power of his strong body grew several times and the injuries on the leg healed in the blink of an eye.

Instinctively understanding that escaping was impossible, Homura covered Ayato who was unconscious.

The Minotaur wasn't going to show mercy, even to a non-resistant prey.

It bent its giant body, and dashed forward like a bullet.

Saigō Homura glared at the battle axe raised overhead—and following it, resolved himself for death.

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**1** Gugalanna (GU.GAL.AN.NA) and Guanna (GU<sub>4</sub>.AN.NA) are the same. In fact the only difference is that Gugalanna means the Great Bull of Heaven. It was sent to punish Gilgamesh and Enkidu, but was killed by them. ↵

**2** Play on Kinokuniya Bookstore ↵

# Chapter 3

—And then.

Along with the gust of wind, his back appeared.

“.....Eh?”

Homura raised a disarrayed voice and looked at the back that appeared in front of him.

That speed which overturned the moment of life and death couldn't even be compared with the speed of lightning.

The boy who appeared instantly, far exceeding human perception speed, caught the swung down battleaxe of Minotaur who was three times the size of human with just his right hand.

Although it was able to cut through specially composed armor like cotton, it couldn't budge this boy in the slightest.

He was so sturdy that it seemed as if the axe was thrust at the steep cliff instead.

If one were to compare, it would be described as nothing but a splash hitting the rock on the water side.

But what truly surprised Homura was not that.

It was that back which was bigger than his own. Since both of their heights had changed, there appeared to be some differences compared to the time he saw him when he was younger.

However, even if his appearance has changed, he would never mistake him for someone else.

On his neck were hanging the Nekomimi headphones which he had supposedly failed to give him five years ago.

In a corner of his mind, he knew that only he could save him from this

predicament, but he thought that only this person would definitely not come —It was a back which wasn't supposed to be here.

The one who saved Saigou Homura – Sakamaki Izayoi declared with angry voice as he caught the battleaxe.

“.....You bastard. What the heck are you doing to this little brother of mine!”

\*

Homura was astonished but that only lasted for an instant.

He threw angry words towards Sakamaki Izayoi who leapt in between him and the Minotaur.

“You are laaaaate!!! What took you so long Iza-nii!!?”

“Haah? Is that the first thing you say after three years? What the hell are you doing at this place in the first place!!?”

“Can’t ya see by looking! I’m being attacked by that bull monster! And it’s been five years since the last meeting, don’t mistake it you dumbass!”

As if his mental strings were cut, Homura showered him with questions.

Certainly, it was apparent that he was being attacked by the mysterious bull.

But the true meaning behind his question was not that.

Besides, there were many other things he wanted to ask, but both of them understood that now wasn't a good time for that. After both of them had frankly said what they wanted to say, they displayed a truly similar behavior.

“I’ll keep company to this bull! You go and quickly escape!”

“I would run but Kouhai’s treatment comes first! Ayato’s condition is critical!”

Ah? He raised a quizzical voice while turning just his head.

“.....I see. Heard that, Suzuka?”

“Aye, sir!”

From somewhere, Ayazato Suzuka’s voice was heard. And along with it, Homura and Ayato’s figures vanished from that place.

And the moment their forms disappeared, Izayoi twisted his body like a spring and drove a kick to the Minotaur’s stomach in front of him. The kick used the whole of the body’s muscles to throw the Minotaur inside the burning school building. It was a herculean strength that was unthinkable for a human, but as if it was nothing special, Izayoi turned his shoulders and took an imposing stance.



“We finally met again eh, Taurus. It took quite some time, didn’t it!”

He plunged inside the burning school without hesitation. He was well aware that the opponent wouldn’t be taken down by that degree of attack.

Within the view distorted from heat haze, the Minotaur raised a cry and charged.

『GEEEYAAAAaaa—!!!』

Its battleaxe cut through the flames as it traveled. It was a blow far faster and stronger compared to the time when it was chasing Homura.

On the contrary, Izayoi was empty-handed. If he did not block or avoid it, his internal organs would definitely scatter apart.

But Izayoi didn’t show any signs of defending.

“Hah!—Too arrogant!!!”

—And punched the battleaxe.

『GYa.....!!?』

Minotaur raised an emotional cry for the first time. If one were to put its emotion in words, it would’ve been something like “That’s crazy!?” And what happened just now was by no means a metaphor. Izayoi stopped Minotaur’s full-powered blow of battleaxe with his first and forced it back.

『——！』

Minotaur, whose momentum was stopped in its tracks, immediately leapt back to reaffirm the situation.

On the other hand, Izayoi laughed fearlessly while shaking his fist that became numb.

“It was quite a nice blow, but too bad. Just like you govern the Taurus, I hold the Leo. Thanks to that, I have gained a body that’s immune to bladed weapons like that. No matter how you attack with that weapon, you’d better be ready to get beaten to death.”

『.....!!』

Izayoi provoked it with finger. It wasn’t apparent from the bull’s expression,

but it seemed to have understood. After preparing the battleaxe, the bull behaved as if it was examining the situation.

(.....? That's strange. It seemed to have no intelligence some time ago.)

*Did it undergo some dramatic change?*—Before he could find answer to that question, the Minotaur rushed at Izayoi while raising a roar.

But it wasn't stupid enough to repeat the same attack over and over. The Minotaur charged in the burning school and attacked by throwing the nearby debris using its giant body and battleaxe.

“Oh.....!”

He reflexively leaked an exclamation from the unexpected tactics. The flame bullets swallowed up the previously broken armor fragments and rushed at Izayoi. Each one of them seemed to have the power to destroy buildings. After scattering and covering everything in front, as expected, avoidance was impossible.

That's why Izayoi—decided to return the hit.

“Take this!!!”

With a roar, Izayoi's fist smashed the wall of debris as if he was repelling a billow.

However, he didn't just smash it.

Towards the entire debris in front, he responded with a fist that blew away everything in surroundings. If one returned a tsunami against the spray of rocks, it was no wonder that they would be swallowed up.

Minotaur, whose entire body was pierced by debris fragments and a sweltering heat, couldn't endure the pain and raised a scream.

『GEEYAAAAaaa.....!!!』

“Now now, you are slowly starting to scream more like a beast..... Good grief, even though you should've stayed obediently inside the labyrinth, you came till the outside world while behaving unusually..... Moreover, to be pinpointing my relatives and making a move on them, what's the big idea?”

Izayoi Sakamaki's mouth warped into a smile. Right now, he was unusually angry for real.

Naturally, he didn't expect that Minotaur would answer that question. Despite the foam gushing out from its mouth, the Minotaur's will to fight didn't loosen a bit.

Izayoi also clenched his fist and prepared for battle.

Meanwhile *Saigou Homura* and *Kudou Ayato* appeared in the middle of third department laboratory room.

Although *Kudou Ayato*'s consciousness was hazy, she raised a voice full of wonder towards the phenomenon she experienced moments ago.

“Teleportation.....! Could it be that this is *Suzuka*'s.....?”

“Aya-chan, are you okay!?”

While surprised, this time she unmistakably witnessed phenomenon with her own eyes.

Inside the third study and research building, there didn't seem to be anyone other than Homura and Ayato, but in spite of this, Ayazato Suzuka suddenly appeared before her eyes.

“*Suzuka*..... Just now, what did you...”

“Let's save that for later. Stopping the bleeding comes first! Homura, would the bandages suffice!?”

“It's impossible with just that! Get the needle and antiseptics, also get the case that's below the desk of lab manager!”

“Got it! Are these needles and antiseptics!?”

From empty space, the medical instruments appeared one by one. As *Suzuka* randomly moved her right hand, medical instruments seemed to appear one after another below her left hand.

Ayato's surprise grew even more.

*(This..... Isn't a simple Teleportation.....!?)*

"Ayato. I'm gonna apply anesthetics and stitch the wound, so I'm gonna take off some of your clothes. Please endure it."

Meanwhile, Homura continued to skillfully do the emergency treatment. It was a relief that the wound did not reach to the internal organs, but she had still lost too much blood. It seemed that the blood kept flowing rapidly thanks to the heavy rain outside.

"It will be bad if she doesn't get blood transfusion. Suzuka, quickly move us to the hospital"

"Ah— .....That might prove to be difficult?"

"What?" Homura said in surprise.

".....Why? It shouldn't be a problem with your Apport&Asport right?<sup>[1]</sup> That bull beast is being kept at bay by Iza-nii so this is the only time for us to escape."

"I also thought so at first..... But, the moment I left the school building, I was attacked by a thunderbolt you know? If Iza-nii didn't come to the rescue, I think I would've been burnt black."

Homura showed a dubious look to Suzuka's words. Although he was partly doubting it, the bit of what she said about being attacked by lighting meant that carelessly leaving the research room was also not a good idea.

"It can't be helped. I will use blood-producing medicine. And one more thing, this is a precious research material that Everything Company entrusted to be..... But, this is a matter of life and death. I'd be grateful if you overlook this, Ayato-Ojousama"

".....Alright. I'm leaving it to you Senpai."

After saying that, what he took out were three round capsules with an opaque liquid inside them. On the surface of capsules was written 3S. Nano Machine Unit<sup>[2]</sup>.

*(There are just three precious "Origins", but Ojousama's life is on the line here. No choice but to sacrifice it.)*

Before long, he sucked up one of them into the syringe and injected it to Ayato while hiding the remaining two inside his coat. *With this, the emergency treatment had ended for now*, thought Homura with relief.

But without giving him time to rest, the lightning now pierced through the lab window.

“Both of you get down!”

The broken fragments of glass scattered around whole place. Homura felt slightly confused, but that was only natural. He hid under the lab desk while looking at the thundercloud to confirm the situation.

There, he saw something that shocked him the most tonight.

*(A cumulonimbus cloud..... took on the form of a bull.....!!?)*

It was a cumulonimbus cloud that wriggled like a living thing. Its overall length seemed to be dozens of kilometres. It didn't take long for him to realise that such phenomenon and form didn't exist in nature. And the worst part of it was that the cumulonimbus bull was glaring and directing hostility towards the laboratory where three of them were hiding.

“.....What the heck. Isn't that truly a “Taurus” already.....!!!”

Typhoon #link24 “Taurus”. Homura grit his teeth from that ironic name.

He desperately thought of a new plan, but all the wildcards were used up. He couldn't do anything else.

When he thought that every means were used up——Ayato started talking.

“.....Senpai. Haven't you received a letter?”

“Hah?”

“A letter. In this situation..... It should have been delivered to you as the final means of escape.....!”

——Letter. Speaking of it, both Ayato and Tokuteru were saying the same. It was about whether some “Absolutely Impossible” letter had reached Homura or not.

“It should've absolutely..... Absolutely reached you. Senpai should have

enough achievements to be invited. If it's Queen, she would never allow Senpai to die in such abnormal situation. As the final means, she should have sent the written invitation.....!!!"

Ayato called out frantically. The "Taurus" further increased in density, seeming as if it was falling from the sky. There was no other means to escape so he had no choice but to trust her words.

Homura began to rapidly recall the events that happened in the last few days.

*(A letter..... Absolutely impossible letter, to begin with, in what kind of circumstances.....! Letter falling from the sky? Letter in locked room? A calico cat arriving with letter in it's mouth? If something that amusing ever happened, there's no way I'd forget it even if I only saw it once you idiot!)*

Homura frantically kept recollecting memories as his desperation grew. Leaving Tokuteru aside, he knew very well that Ayato was not a person who would make such meaningless joke. In that case, he should've absolutely received it.

But he could not remember it no matter what. Even if he did, the sender was so mysterious he might as well have been unknown. What Ayato was saying was that it was incredible to the extent that it was impossible to receive such a mail—

"The sender is..... Queen? I see, so it was that mail huh!"

It was the mail he received from an unknown sender to the email address that only the members of study and research should've known. Certainly, the email address of the sender seemed to be **Queen.Hallowe'en@ne.jp**.

"Shit, make it in time!"

Retrieving the phone, he searched for the mail contents.

"Taurus" clad in the cumulonimbus cloud started rapidly descending down. That was by no means a metaphor and it seemed as if the sky was falling down. Homura, who finally found it in the mailbox, barraged the buttons without confirming the contents of the mail. In that moment, the aurora filled the room as if wrapping around three of them.

But without faltering, the “Taurus” fell to the ground from the sky. Right after that, the third study and research building where three of them were was destroyed, without leaving a trace as if it was bombarded.

\*

—Suddenly, the field of vision of those three underwent a drastic change. The veil of darkness that was supposed to be dim, was broken apart by the bright sunlight, and as if informing them about the opening of stage curtains, a dazzling world was reflected in their eyes.

The strong atmosphere kept on rubbing their cheeks. However, that didn't seemed to be a sudden gust of wind.

Saigou Homura, Kudou Ayato and Ayazato Suzuka were..... freely falling from a place 4 000 meters above ground.

“Wha-!”

“Wah-!?”

“.....!!!”

Before their eyes spread out the scenery that had never been seen before.

A giant tree that created the illusion it was piercing the sky.

A giant bird had a nest on it's trunk and an aquatic city spread out at it's roots.

Despite suffering from the pressure that accompanied the fall, Saigou Homura and Ayazato Suzuka's impressions were identical and their hearts also carried the similar feelings of shock.

“Wh..... What is this place!?”

Their confusion had now reached the extreme. As expected, they didn't anticipate this development. More importantly, if they continued freefalling like

this and hit the water's surface, it was apparent that they would die instantly.

—That said, there was no need for worry.

The visitors had the Gift of buffer applied to them before they reached the ground, but only Kudou Ayato knew about that fact.

*(Ah..... It seems I was fated to return to this world after all.....)*

Ayato alone was accepting everything with tranquil eyes while thinking of something.

Yes—The place they were summoned to, was the perfect alternate world.

---

**1** This why he said she's a psych. **Apport** is a is the paranormal transference of an article from one place to another. Asport is the opposite. ↪

**2** Third Type Star Particle Body. ↪

## Chapter 4

A large waterfall that flowed from a giant tree's trunk.

An aquatic city built by the riverside.

Enormous birds unheard of were flying about in the sky.

Even while denying the “impossible” scenery that unfolded before his eyes, Saigou Homura, like an ultra-speed computer, was quickly thinking of countermeasures.

*(Around...4000m in the sky! If the air resistance is the same, then it'll take about 90 seconds before we hit the ground! Dammit, will we make it?)*

The three continued to accelerate under the freefall.

While embracing Ayato, Homura made a quick decision.

“Suzuka! At this rate, we’ll die instantly once we hit the ground! Can you transport us to the middle of a river?”

“I can, but that will probably be useless! My Apport & Asport transfers the bodies along with their kinetic energy!”

“Tch, I have never heard of this before, sister.....!”

But it was something to be expected if one thought about it. If the energy was not transferred along, the forces operating the human body would be left behind.

The moment he realized this, despair began to sink in. Ayazato Suzuka's maximum effective range was only 120 meters. Taking the gravitational acceleration into account, transferring them directly to the ground with maximum distance wouldn't be much different from a direct collision.

30 seconds left before impact.

Throwing caution to the wind, Homura shouted.

“Then, could you change the direction of the kinetic energy as you transfer?”

“Wh-what do you mean!?”

“It’s hard to explain but kinetic energy should have the same direction as the moving object! Therefore, if the direction of our bodies was changed, we should gain a slim chance of survival! I’m guessing that it might diminish the kinetic energy! There is no time left, I’m counting on you——!!!”

Three seconds left before crashing. Suzuka raised her right hand and changed their direction just as Homura instructed. Despite the risks this theory entailed in this life and death situation, that decision turned out to be correct.

Reverse-transferred at 20cm above the water’s surface, Homura, along with Ayato, rose vertically. Following that, they flew upwards around a meter before falling back down into the large river.

On the other hand, the reverse transfer didn’t go as smoothly for Suzuka as she was now flying parallel to water’s surface.

“Wah-hyaa!”

As a result, she bounced and rolled along the water’s surface like a skipping stone while screaming. Fortunately, that momentum pushed Suzuka to the riverside. Though she was coughing violently due to the rough experience, her life was not in danger.

Rather, the problem lay in the other two who had fallen in the large river.

“Oof...!”

Fortunately, even though their momentum wasn’t completely killed, there seemed to be something soft underneath the river that saved them. It seemed to be the softness of a living creature, but there was no time to confirm it.

Suzuka’s and Homura’s miscalculation was that the flow of the river was quicker and the depth of it was deeper than they anticipated. He could have probably managed if he were alone, but it was almost impossible to swim to the shore while supporting Ayato.

Amidst the violent water current, Homura faced towards the shore and

started swimming desperately. Although Ayato's bleeding has stopped, her condition was still uncertain. At this rate, it was unknown how her condition would change.

It was necessary to get her body dried immediately, but at the current situation, Homura might be the first to die.

*(The flow...it's too fast...!)*

Even as he swallowed some of the river water, he kept clenching his teeth, desperately moving his body.

It might be possible to swim through if he abandoned Ayato, but that was not an option. If he planned to abandon her, he would have abandoned her long ago. Homura today, in the circumstances that underwent an absurd change, have always acted to the best of his abilities.

So even to the very end, there was no way he could give up.

Homura went beyond his limit, and paddled the water with all his might.

As his life flashed before his eyes and thought he had to finally resign—At that moment, Homura's hand was pulled up strongly by someone.

*(Wh-Who is it!!!)*

“Are you alright!? Please hold on for a bit longer!”

It was a voice he has never heard before. It seemed to belong to a girl.

The hand seemed to belong to a little girl but it was unusually powerful. In the wake of the rapid stream of the large river, she carried Homura and Ayato to the shore in a flash.

While Homura laid down, grasping hard, the aroma of the earth and the warmth of sunlight made him feel strangely comfortable.

—*At any rate, I can have some rest now.*

Due to the peace of mind he felt after being rescued, he abruptly felt that his consciousness was fading away.

But as he suddenly realized that he hasn't thanked the person who saved them, he tried his best to stand up in hopes of at least saying a word of thanks.

But at that moment, the final surprise of the day appeared.

“Who.....Who was the one that fell on my heeeeeaaaaad!!!?”

From the large river, a humongous neck of a snake started to rise up. The riverbed that they hit a while ago turned out to be the head of that giant snake. Homura who didn't have any strength left for surprise, couldn't help but start laughing ironically.

As Homura was thinking that he would simply end up in that snake's belly, he heard the girl from before.

“Please wait a minute, Shirayukihime-sama! I think they were just summoned here——”

The girl was wholeheartedly trying to convince the big snake.

With a hazy mind, Homura looked up to his savior. Although the weight of the blue hair that reached to her waist was increased from absorbing the water, it still resembled a tender moonlight.

She seemed to be approximately 12 years old. She clearly had a childish appearance. It was questionable how such herculean strength dwelled inside this little girl, but in comparison to a single distinctive feature of her body, that kind of question was insignificant.

No, before talking about being a girl, there was a part of her body that was different from humans.

(.....)

Long Usamimi grown on her head. Short tail. Long blue hair.

Just from glancing over it, that silhouette could be tsukkomi'd in many ways. However before he could do so, Homura had lost his consciousness.

The bunny girl who saved Homura bent her head slightly while putting a hand on it.

“Uhh, even though Kuro Usagi doesn't properly understand the circumstances, but just looking at these cat headphones, they could be Izayoi-san's acquaintances, right?”

“And on top of that, they are too weak. Well, we can’t leave them like this.”

Both of them nodded in agreement.

Although the snake was furious, it doesn’t seem to have any plans on catching and eating them.

The bunny girl who called herself Kuro Usagi and the giant white serpent took Homura, Ayato and Suzuka, and started moving straight ahead, towards the bottom of the giant tree while looking up to the sky.

\*

—Houei Private University’s associated Academy, above the middle school building’s wreckage.

At that time, back in school.

“...Seriously. Never in my life have I been manipulated by someone like this.”

Sitting on top of the rubble, Sakamaki Izayoi was feeling frustrated since a while ago. He was always calm and would keep his composure no matter what, and perhaps came somewhat prepared, but this particular game developed into a scale that he became helpless even with his power.

No, that’s incorrect. Comparing the threat of this game, there were many previous predicaments he had faced that went beyond this. But the current gift game was simply out of his field. No matter how much he turns his head and no matter how many fists he swings, he won’t reach a fundamental solution.

“What should I do, Queen. If you summon Minotaur, as well as “Taurus”, Homura and Suzuka to Little Garden while leaving just me here, I wouldn’t be able to return now, would I?”

Yes - The night sky was so serene that the previous raging storm seemed like a

lie. Nothing like an ox shaped cumulonimbus cloud or a giant battleaxe wielding ox were to be seen anywhere. Standing alone on the school building's rubble, Izayoi had no choice but to feel at loss.

*(Well, it won't help no matter how much I think about it. Since this situation has already developed to this, there should still be a place that's linked to it.)*

*For starters, maybe I'll go to that coastal area at South America where the two mysterious oxen have first appeared.*

When he came to such conclusion.

Suddenly, a man's footsteps could be heard getting close as he was kicking the debris.

"Oi oi.....and I was still thinking about how the Heavenly bull disappeared, so it was your doing? Wasn't it extremely flashy, Sakamaki Izayoi. Just who do you think has to deal with this mess, huh?"

Mikado Tokuteru showed a wry smile while holding a cigarette with his mouth.

Seeing Mikado Tokuteru, Izayoi raised a surprised voice.

".....Now this is astounding. Really, I'm seriously surprised. I did not hear that the strongest War God-sama would be coming. Is the current circumstances that serious, Taishakuten?"

"It's Mikado Tokuteru. It could be passed of as a joke if we're in Little Garden, but don't carelessly call me that in the outside world. Others might notice."

Indra told him off in a slightly annoyed tone. He wasn't sure what he was so vigilant about, whatever the reason is, he is not acting rashly.

Izayoi shrugged his shoulders and continued.

"And, about the current situation. Since you came, there was no need for me to come to the outside world, was there?"

"No, our roles are different. All we can do in this matter is to minimize the after-treatment... But actually, in comparison to the typhoon's damage, the virus would be the more troublesome one."

“Heeeh? So the pestilent is really that bad, huh?”

“It can’t be described with just ‘bad’. With it’s infestation, not just the animals, but even the crops will be infected by the virus. In a few months’ time, the prices of wheat and corn would suddenly escalate. Famine will begin in some regions, and after that, it might lead to international currency problems.

With Tokuteru’s statement, Izayoi started frowning more and more.

“.....That ain’t a joke anymore. Will it be alright?”

“It’s not alright. Usually, we always quickly tidy things up with our authority but..... but the current matter at hand is connected to the Sun Authority War. Using the powers of divine spirits to meddle with it is against the rules. You can take care of the aftereffects, but whatever it is, the game has to be cleared with human powers.”

“Whaa, seriously?”

He shook his body to suppress his laughter. He couldn’t help but laugh from all the unfavorable odds that piled up.

Izayoi stood up and while stretching, looked up at the night sky.

“Defeating those mysterious bulls is my job, but aside from that the problem is, who would solve it? Stuff like crop diseases are out of my expertise, you know?”

“Relax. Homura has already found the solution on that issue.”

Ha? - Izayoi raised a disarrayed voice. He did not understand why Homura’s name came up in their conversation.

“Homura’s solution.....Wait a minute. You, what are you making him do?”

“That’s a secret for now. .....And, what will you do now? As things are now, you can’t return, right? If you have nothing particular to do, how about you join my company?”

“Company? What the, you are managing a company?”

“Yes. I’m a guy who satisfies god’s boredom of having too much time in the outside world. Until two years ago, I’ve been a free agent and did various

activities, it turned out to be unexpectedly enjoyable. I got carried away and made a company. It's a place called International Security Service mainly employing mercenaries."

".....Hnn? Then, is it profitable?"

"Well, so-so. The customer, Everything Company pays just enough to stay afloat. Like this, I have to earn while descending to humans."

Mikado Tokuteru suddenly averted his gaze.

But if that's true, then it would be the strongest mercenary group in history. Along with it being the most reliable.

"Everything company - Is it that large a company? You have some good connections."

"Of course, that company.....Ah, I see. You still haven't met with the Ojousama, huh?"

Haa? Izayoi let out a voice.

Tokuteru showed a unpleasant grin and started walking.

"Anyway, understanding the current situation is the top priority. We also have to have a strategy meeting soon."

"That's fine, but where are we going? To your company?"

"That's fine, but it is a little dirty. We'll stay overnight at Canaria Foster Home and decide everything by tomorrow."

—Izayoi's eyebrow twitched. He looked like he wanted say something about the current situation, but he didn't have any particular complaints so he'd just save complaining for later.

In order to come up with a solution, the two of them started walking towards their destination - Canaria Family Home.

Then suddenly, Izayoi looked up at the sky.

*(Which reminds me.....Homura and the others, I wonder where they fell in Little Garden.....?)*

\*

—“Great waterfall of Underwood”, the guest room within the Great Tree.

Sleeping on the straw bed, Homura suddenly awoke in an unfamiliar comfort. But along with the waking of his senses, his body felt so heavy that even simply raising his body was out of the question.

(.....*Where, is this?*)

While facing up, he started to confirm the situation he was in now.

Judging from his physical condition, he has presumably slept for about half a day. The body sensation he felt seemed to be from not moving his body for around half of the day rather than from fatigue.

The only question remaining was the location of this place.

Looking up, there was nothing like illumination, instead there was only a lamp placed within this wooden built room. As for the reason why he felt a sense of discomfort in that room, it was due to the fact that he was not able to see any seam no matter where he looked. It seemed as if the room was carved inside a large tree.

*(Which reminds me..... While falling, we saw that ridiculously large tree. Where we carried over there?)*

If that is so, then this was probably inside of that large tree.

His limbs did not seem to be bound. Certainly, it seemed to be a safe place. However, just when Homura turned his head sideways to look at the interior of the room, he saw two strange protruding objects besides the bed.

“.....”

—*Usaa!*

Along with that sound, two protruding objects<sup>[1]</sup> perked up.

While he was still half asleep and dizzy, Homura tilted his head and wondered “What’s that?” as he stretched his hand towards them and pulled.

“Tei!”

“Fugyaal!”

A shriek came from the bedside. And along with it, a loli with usamimi hopped up.

“Wa-Wait a minute! I silently consented up to the point when you touched them, but pulling Kuro Usagi’s lovely usamimi without even introducing yourself, what do you think you are doing!?”

“It was done out of curiosity.”

“That excessively carefree statement that brings *deja vu* is banned!!!”

With a “Spaan!”, the Usamimi Loli hit his head with a paper fan she took out from somewhere..

—*Yea, at this point, nothing more can surprise me.*

After witnessing that ox shaped cumulonimbus cloud and ox-headed Minotaur.

Even if one or two more usamimi girls appear, it won’t be a surprise anymore. Compared to that, one, two, three or four usamimis are too cute for one’s sake.



Above all else, he didn't feel any malice or hostility, indicating that there were no hostile intentions.

"Uhh, first let me confirm. The one who saved us was you.....Kuro Usagi, right?"

"YES! Kuro Usagi saved you!"

"I see. Then, once again, thank you very much. Aside from me, my junior's condition was considerably dangerous right?"

He indirectly asked about the other two's safety. While understanding the motives of his question, Kuro Usagi frankly smiled and nodded.

"That's right. Suzuka-san only has a bump on her head, while the other person.....Ayato-san suffered from a severe bleeding. However, thanks to the treatment, she is already up and should be roaming around outside!"

Seeing that Kuro Usagi's words held no lie in them, Homura was relieved bringing him peace of mind.

".....Thank god. Kuro Usagi seems dependable."

"YES! Please have faith in me! .....By the way, it's about time you named yourself, right?"

"Yep. I'm Saigou Homura, nice to meet you. By the way, is that "Kuro Usagi" a nickname?"

"While you could say that, it's also my real name! So, please call me Kuro Usagi!"

He slightly nodded while holding back a tsukkomi. Since if such was a part of their customs, he would have any qualms with it.

Now that he was fully awake to calmly use his head, he took another look at the usamimi girl.

From her stature, she looked about 10 years old, but her responses were unexpectedly fluent.

He wasn't able to see it from the bed before, but her posture and behaviour was rather good, and at a glance, she appeared to be a bit older. The main

reason for that, was her face that looked surprisingly well arranged and had a mature look. In a few years, she would become a stunning beauty.

“Uhh, then, Kuro Usagi. I have few questions to ask, would that be okay?”

“Of course. But before that, let’s join up with the other two, shall we?”

“Of course, please lead the way.”

“YES! Well then, let’s go!”

With an “Usaa!”, Kuro Usagi’s usamimi stood up as she advanced.

Homura then put on his already dried coat and followed after her.

The corridor that he thought was inside of that large tree was actually a wooden space. It seemed that it was not his imagination that there was slightly high humidity.

Listening closely, the sound of flowing water could be heard from somewhere.

*(Although the grains are similar to the likes of a camphor tree, but it couldn’t possibly be raised to such a colossal height)*

After all, it was definitely a work of a power different from the laws of nature that he knew.

While his curiosity was itching a little, it was better to follow this usamimi girl for now. It would be no joke if he got lost or something.

Kuro Usagi was quietly giggling as she glanced back at Homura’s tensed up expression.

“Fufu, I’m surprised. I have heard from Izayoi-san about his family, but you are surprisingly quite obedient. Though, at first you were very confused.”

“.....You know Iza-nii?”

“YES! Izayoi-san is a member of a same community as Kuro Usagi. He was summoned exactly 3 years ago, wasn’t he?”

Three years ago—As a matter of fact, Izayoi had also said the same thing as her. But from Homura and others’ memory, Izayoi Sakamaki disappeared exactly 5 years ago.

*(Does the flow of time differ from ours.....? Speaking of which, it was lucky for this to happen during Golden Week. Or in a worse case, this might have become a case of disappearance.)*

Well, the school building was wrecked to that extent. Even when Golden Week is over, the school won't be opening for a while. While musing about such random things, he continued walking inside the great tree.

After walking for a while, a sound like that of a steam whistle was heard from the opposite side of the wall of the great tree.

Homura asked as he listens to the unexpected sound.

Just now.....what that a steam whistle? Is there a train here?"

"YES! It's the spirit train that started to become popular just recently. Do you want to see it?"

A spirit train—From those unfamiliar words, his curiosity started throbbing more and more. Noticing that, Kuro Usagi turned to the side road while suppressing her laughter and stepped outside the great tree.

At that instant—With a gust of wind, Saigou Homura's field of vision was dominated by the serene water and colors of deep green.

"Wha-!"

In the middle of a large tree, 250m above ground, the wind was blowing sideways. And at the same time, a second steam whistle was raised. Homura bended down from the handrail to take a look at it.

Then he was amazed once again. It was not seen clearly from the distance, but it seemed that the shape of this great tree was spread above the great river.

From the trunks of this great tree, the sucked up water was flowing like a waterfall, or maybe more like a rain, or better put, like a drizzle and rained down on the town below. The aquatic city evolved into a form that took advantage of that and used it as a power source for things like water wheels and water-powered elevators.

Taking a closer look, something that reminded him of an old city was sank underneath the waterway.

“How is it? The scenery of “Underwood” that was reborn as an aquatic city.

“Reborn?”

“YES! Since one year ago, after the water tree’s great spirit awakened, The rainfall of this water tree increased. Then, Izayoi-san and the others along with other communities worked hard for the aquatic city and as a result, it took the current shape of this scenery.”

“.....Iza-nii made this town?”

He muttered while looking below. Then, along with a steam whistle, a giant train emerged from under the water.

While Homura was staring in wonder, he pulled Kuro Usagi’s usamimi.

“O-oi! The train came from under the water!”

“Y-YES! It’s a spirit train that moves with extremely high speed on spirit passages that are called the Ley Lines. If you are interested, do you want to take a look at it? While you’re at it, could you let go of my usamimi?

“I am! Let’s go quickly!”

Homura caught her usamimi in excitement and quickly dashed down the stairs.

On the way, he jumped on the water-powered elevator, vigorously turned the pulley and descended to the ground with a speed as if he was falling.

While the pulley rotated with a comfortable “Karakara” sound, the water current adjusted it’s speed.

The structures itself resembled the buildings from the early medieval times, but this clear stream and this great tree city were plenty enough indeed. Compared to the modern high speed elevators that moved quietly, this one could bring more emotions and delight to humans.

Homura and Kuro Usagi who vigorously descended, dashed out from the elevator and continued walking in downtown. Everywhere in the downtown were lined-up by the waterways. The fountain water was also showing a superb performance by raising up and transforming by adjusting the lightings.

The open-air markets were filled with enthusiasm, crowds, shops selling strange ornaments, and grilled animals that looked like a mix of a deer and a bird which he had never seen was just right before the boy's sight and appealed to his senses.

Homura, who has not visited such a place even in the outside world, could only turn speechless in mute amazement.

Then, from the opposite side of the crowd, a well familiar voice was heard.

"Oh, It's Homura, Aya-chan! Looks like he finally came!"

"Yeah. Making two ladies wait, what a hopeless Senpai."

Suzuka was in high spirits while holding candied apples in each hand, while Ayato held a strawberry omelette. After noticing Homura, the two of them started walking over to him as they split the crowd.

On the other hand, Homura, whose sight was stolen by the scenery, was still petrified.

Looking at such face of his, Kuro Usagi tilted her usamimi.

"Homura-san? What's wrong?"

"Ah, no, rather than this or that being wrong.....better put, I can't help but want to throw a tsukkomi at the world."

He was dumbfounded—— .....and while being at loss about how to express something, he was muttering vague things.

Among the people that looked like half beasts, a child who couldn't be described other than as a spirit was playing on the fountain. In front of such fantastic scene, it could be said that his train of thought had been burnt.

In front of such fulfilling scenery, was it right to be perplexed and be lost for words?

Was it right to accept everything and have fun like Suzuka and Ayato?

Kuro Usagi's ears shook as she smiled at Homura who was at a loss.

"Now now. Seeing that the questions are piled up, how about we have lunch for now?"

“.....Yeah...right. Is there a good restaurant nearby?”

“Let’s see. In this season..... I think something like grilled Sakami bird and Peryton’s<sup>[2]</sup> ham and fried eggs should be fine!”

*Now, this is one extremely carnivorous rabbit.* Homura wanted to throw a tsukkomi more and more now but it was also true that he was hungry.

Hence, as the first action in another world, let’s have a meal.

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**1** Usamimi. <sup>←</sup>

**2** Peryton, a hybrid of a stag and a bird. <sup>←</sup>

## Chapter 5

—Aquatic City of “Underwood”.

Garden restaurant of “Six Scars”.

With Kuro Usagi’s suggestion, Saigou Homura, Ayazato Suzuka and Kudou Ayato were brought to the riverside restaurant from where the “Spirit Train” could be seen clearly. The terrace was crowded with visitors who had come to see the “Spirit Train”, that was going in and out of the water in 10 minute intervals. Never before seen cuisine like grilled Sakurami bird, Peryton’s ham and eggs, giant pumpkin cold soup and such various things were carried to the table.

But, ignoring such things as cuisine, Homura and others were intently watching the departure of the “Spirit Train”.

“Ohh.....!”

After each departure of “Spirit Train” loaded with baggage, the sprays of water danced, creating large rainbows on the riverside. And following it, cheers were raised from somewhere.

With that dazzling scenery in front of him, Homura further raised a voice of admiration.

“Ohh.....!!!”

Two of them were looking while bending forward from the terrace’s fence. After seeing off the “Spirit Train” all the way before it vanished from the bottom of the river, Homura returned to his seat and exaggeratedly crossed his arms.

“.....Hm. Not bad. It was somewhat OK.”

“Stop lying brother. It was super fun, wasn’t it?”

Suzuka looked amazed while Homura sulked.

While giggling, Ayato brought black tea to her mouth.

“I was surprised. I thought Senpai lacked hobbies, but as it turns out you like trains, huh?”

“No no, it’s a bit different Aya-chan. Homura likes vehicles as a whole. You see, in old days, he, together with Iza-nii used to make plastic models of airplanes and cars.”

“Suzuka. Stop saying unnecessary things.”

Homura was getting more and more sullen.

Ayato blinked from further surprise.

He was always doing nothing but research, so seeing enjoyment on his face was a rarity. From what Ayato knew, he was reading books at home even at occasional holidays.

Sitting next to them, Kuro Usagi was also lending an usamimi to them with an amused feeling.

“Kuro Usagi is also surprised. Those plastic models are model products, right? I was not aware that Izayoi-san had such hobbies.”

“That person only went along with me. We competed with each other in things like which of us would construct them faster. ....Thinking about it now, it was the only contest I won against Iza-nii.”

A nostalgic smile appeared on Homura’s face. But before one could think, he had already changed back to being sullen.

While grinning broadly, Suzuka poked his cheek.

“I was also like that, but Homura in old days was always stuck behind Iza-nii. During the time he had been missing, we also recalled various memories from time to time.”

“Is that right?”

“That’s right. ....Well, we understood that he was a person who would disappear someday. But when he did disappear, it was really too sudden. Thanks to that, we had many hardships.”

“Suzuka.”

With a serious voice, Homura rebuked Suzuka who was continuing the talk about the bygone days with a smile.

Kuro Usagi tilted her usamimi and showed somewhat serious expression.

“The hardships.....in other words, the troubles Izayoi-san left behind, is that what you want to say?”

“Of course not. Sure, he was a hopeless person, meeting all three requirements of being arrogant, self-centered and hedonist, but.....That person, he was not someone who would pass the remains of the trouble he himself created to his family, right?”

“But the extent of the brawls were large you know. He would team up with Don Bruno or old man Ushimatsu, and later with Canaria-sensei, and picked fights with people of high social standings as his hobby.”

“That’s right. According to him “Strong power should be used against a strong opponent to be cool!” or something was a stupid excuse of his. If I remember correctly, his favorite motto was.....”

“It was——“The heavens don’t produce people above me!””

*Pfff*—Kuro Usagi spurt out the tea.

She probably thought that it was very much like him, but on the other hand, it was indeed a foolish motto.

“T-That, how should I say, it’s the typical Izayoi. He lived the same way even in homeplace huh.”

“He wasn’t someone who would change just because his living place changed. —About that, even Kuro Usagi should know, right?”

“Fufu, that may be true.”

Kuro Usagi shook her usamimi while giving a cheerful laugh.

Both sides had many more things to talk about, but the conversation wasn’t advancing any further.

Kuro Usagi gained attention with a cough.

“Now, now, let’s proceed with the feast! Now it’s about time for Kuro Usagi to tell everyone about this world——“The World of Little Garden”.”

Yes! Suzuka got fired up.

Homura’s expression became serious.

Ayato kept her calm expression.

Getting each of their affirmations, Kuro Usagi pulled out a single card.

“Well then, three of you. Should I say the usual phrase? Should I? Here I go! Welcome! To the “World of Little Garden”! We have summoned the three of you to present the qualification to the “Gift Games” where only people who have been bestowed Gifts can participate!”

“.....Gift Games?”

“That’s right! You three should have already realized that you are not ordinary humans! Those unusual powers are the Gifts bestowed by various war gods and deities, Demons, Spirits and Stars. “Gift Games” are where you compete with using those “Gifts”. And, this world of little garden is a stage created for those Gift holders with strong powers to lead an enjoyable life!”

*Usaa!* Kuro Usagi’s usamimi jumped up as she explained.

But Suzuka and Homura exchanged glances and asked surprised.

“Eh, wait a second. In this world, you can’t be summoned unless you have those Gifts?”

“YES!”

“Absolutely? Without exception?”

“YES, YES, YES♪ Suzuka-san should have an idea about her own power, right?”

“Well, yeah, I have but.....”

Homura and Suzuka exchanged glances.

Both of them were well aware that they were special. Therefore, there was nothing surprising up to this point. If there was a problem then——It was about Kudou Ayato’s existence. If the current talk is true, It would be unreasonable if she didn’t have the power known as Gift.

“Umm.....Aya-chan?”

“Suzuka. Let’s leave that talk for later. ....Please continue, Kuro Usagi-san. There should be some conditions for us to participate in those Gift Games, right?”

“YES! Before participating in Gift Games, It’s absolutely necessary to belong to an organization. Those are the numerous “communities” that exist in Little Garden.”

“Hm-Hm. So, what happens when you win?”

“The winner of Gift Games gets the prize from the game “Host”! The possible prizes can be money, lands, rights, honor, human beings.....and even the stakes of Gifts. If you take new Gifts from other, it would be possible to challenge even higher level Gift Games as well. Given that, if you lose in a Gift Game which has Gifts at stake, naturally——your own Gift will be taken away, so please take note.”

Mufufu, Kuro Usagi laughed provocatively.

At this point, Suzuka’s eyes were shining.

“Fufu, isn’t that useless worrying I wonder? Even if he looks like this, my brother Saigou Homura is unbelievably strong when it come to games you know?”

“Fufu, then, I look forward to it. Skilled Gift Game players are stars of this Little Garden world! Please do enjoy it to your hearts content♪.”

“.....Well, will do it in time. Who are ones who Host and bestow Gifts in these Gift Games? It couldn’t possibly be real gods, right?”

“YES! This is the world of Little Garden where war gods and buddhas gather! To tell you the truth, This Kuro Usagi is also a descendant of “Moon Rabbits” from tales of buddhism!”

Ehem! Kuro Usagi threw out her chest with her usamimi raised.

Suzuka and Homura widened their eyes looking bit more surprised.

“Hey hey, Homura. “Moon Rabbit”..... If I remember correctly, it’s one of the Buddhist tales from Konjaku Monogatarishū<sup>[1]</sup> right?”

“Yeah. If I’m not mistaken, It’s a tale about a rabbit that in order to save an injured old man, threw itself into the fire to be eaten. The reason moon’s surface took the resemblance to the rabbit is because Taishakuten invited that devoted rabbit to the moon, or so.”

“Uhaa! It’s a super major tale isn’t it! Kuro Usagi is a famous rabbit!?”

“No, not to that degree! Although, Kuro Usagi is their descendant. —Now, lets return back to topic shall we. Like this, the existences admired as legends from outside world, or perhaps the existences who left great achievements in human history, are permitted to establish a spirit rank in this world of Little Garden, and could also be awarded with various Gifts!”

“.....? Can they even contribute to human history?”

“YES! Rather, probably there are many such people in Little Garden.”

—*I see*, He nodded seemingly satisfied from the answer.

“If it has such meaning, there is indeed a chance for me to be summoned.”

“Hohou? Do you have confidence in your own achievements?”

“I wonder about that. Since those achievements aren’t my own, I’m just half-confident. Please continue.”

Yes, Kuro Usagi answered cheerfully with raised usamimi.

“Then, let’s return to the talk about Gift Games. Actually, there are two greatly different kinds of it. One of them are Games intended to test the humans, held by war gods and deities who have too much time on their hands. These are many times free to participate from its characteristics, but since the “Hosts” are war gods and deities, they are often brutal and difficult, and life could be at risk. However, the reward is big in return. It depends on the “Host”, but even getting a new “Gift” isn’t just a dream.”

“Fumu Fumu. Then, there are more normal Games as well right?”

“Of course! Normal games have the format of participation by paying the designated chips for the entrance fee. There are held as an industrial business of the communities, and are the source of income for the organizations.”

Finally at this point, the color of their eyes change as they got motivated.

“Since they are at the level of industrial business, they are Games that leans towards entertainment right?”

“Now now, I wonder about that? If you don’t understand the meaning of the Game, you could present the favorable conditions for the Host’s side you know?”

“Hou? In other words, the game rules could only be tampered by negotiating with the Hosts, right?”

“O-Ooh.....! How sharp of you Homura-san. That’s right, that is the so called “Game Making”, the act of negotiation. It’s a vital skill for advancing the negotiations with the Hosts or performing as groups in Games.”

“I see, I see. I understood everything well. In short, Gift Games refer to the businesses and trades that the organizations called communities do, right?..... Does currency or bartering exist here?”

“YES! Trades are spread as much as Gift Games!”

“As expected. Otherwise, the circulation using the spirit train wouldn’t be practical. Circulating it with just Games would be impossible after all. .....In that sense, it would be a wise move to earn for pressing expenses with Gift Games, while another person focused on raising the money by trading, huh.”

Homura thought about the current matter while holding a hand to his chin.

Kuro Usagi widened her eyes from surprise.

“H-How should I say.....You two are the polar opposites of Izayoi-san.”

“Polar opposites? With Iza-nii?”

“YES. When I heard that Izayoi-san’s family might have been summoned, I prepared myself for the worst, but you’ve been great guests after arriving, or should I say.....I’m relieved that you two are acting like honor students.”

Kuro Usagi sighed seeming from relief.

Homura and Suzuka on the contrast, showed somewhat complicated expressions.

“.....I’d like to hear it once about that. That person, did he do something even

at this place?"

"Speaking of that, he went around picking fights left and right in Little Garden, from "City of Brilliant Flames" in the North to "Underwood" in the South, he rushed about without restraint, bringing vigorously big troubles everywhere! If he was as reliable as you two, then even Kuro Usagi..... Even Kuro Usagi wouldn't have underwent that much trouble.....!!!"

The loli Kuro Usagi broke down crying. Only that brute guy could make such a young girl cry from worry.

"Uhhm.....Our Iza-nii has given you lots of hardships."

"But he was the same even in the orphanage, that person. —Anyway, we should get down to business now."

Homura's expression had hints of unease. As if waiting for it, Kuro Usagi also straightened up.

Summarizing the chain of conversations in his mind, Homura asked with a serious expression.

"I'll ask without beating around the bush. Is there a way for us to return to our former world?"

".....What?"

Kuro Usagi answered blankly. Her puzzled expression was clearly saying "What is he talking about I wonder?".

Homura got flustered from that reaction. He pushed aside the cuisine from the table and leaned forward.

".....We can't return?"

"T-That's not it! That's not it at all, but..... E-Eeh? Isn't that strange? In the first place, only people who "Have reason to arrive in the world of Little Garden" are supposed to be summoned here.....by the way, what was written on the invitation letter?"

Homura thought back in surprise. It was an emergency back then so he had no time to read the contents.

Quickly taking out the phone, he saw the mysterious mail address—Queen.Hallowe'en@ne.jp. Written on the mail subject was the following.

### 『— The Second Sun Authority War Invitation —』

“W-What the!!?”

Kuro Usagi widened her eyes in surprise the moment she saw the LCD screen.

“T-The Second Sun Authority War Invitation!!? W-W-Why did an outsider like Homura get this kind of thing!?”

“No, even if you say something like that...”

“Senpai. Let’s confirm the contents of the letter first for now.”

That’s right, he nodded. Urged by Ayato, Homura and others started to confirm the contents.

### 『 — The Second Sun Authority War Invitation —

Dear Saigou Homura-sama.

**You have earned the entry qualifications to the “Second Sun Authority War” being held in the world of Little Garden. For gaining the qualifications to enter the final selection, please enslave at least one celestial beast belonging to the “Twelve Ecliptic Constellations” or “Twelve Chén of the Equator” first.**

**Celestial Beasts required to subjugate: “Taurus”**

**Winning Condition: ① Subjugation of Avatar of “Taurus”.**

**Winning Condition: ② Erase the lightning, and return the star to its original form.**

## ※ Rule Summary/Duration Period

**Due to this being a preliminary game, the duration period would be seven years. After seven years, you would automatically be disqualified from game. No matter who subjugates the beast, it will counted to Saigou Homura so please, feel free to cooperate.**

## ※ Important Points ※

**This frame of participation is a special frame that was prepared so that Saigou Homura could participate in the Second Sun Authority War. If you abstain/abandon/ignore the participation or are eliminated in the preliminary round, the special participation frame as well as the inherent Gift “Proto Idea” that Saigou Homura-sama possesses would be collected, so please forgive us.**

**Furthermore, during the game period, you cannot leave the Little Garden so please be careful. Prolonging the game can be considered but please try to complete the requirements within the given time.**

**Yours Sincerely,**

**Second Sun Authority War Facilitators “Laplace Demons”.』**

The moment he finished reading it, Homura hit the table and raised a protest.

“D.....Don’t screw with me!!!”

From Homura’s yell, the surrounding audience started murmuring.

Grasping the phone with shivering hands, He read it once more.

“The duration period is seven years you say.....!? You can’t go back during it

you say.....!? Don't screw with me, there's no way I'd just accept such conditions!!"

"H-Homura. Try to calm down a little."

"As if I can calm down!!! If I.....If we don't return, what's going to happen to the orphanage!? Everything Company would stop the funding you know! If that happens, at that point, it would be the end of the orphanage for sure!"

Being high-strung from consecutive emergencies, Homura finally exploded from restlessness.

But, that was inevitable.

Even now, the existence of Saigou Homura was necessary for the "Canaria Family Home". If he went missing for seven years, the fundings would certainly stop.

With an unusually tensed attitude Suzuka also asked Kuro Usagi.

"Kuro Usa. Is there nothing we can do about this? We can't return from abstaining from the game either?"

".....This is difficult. If you haven't agreed to the invitation, you wouldn't have been summoned to Little Garden to begin with."

Kuro Usagi dropped her usamimi apologetically.

Finally at that point, Kudou Ayato raised her voice.

Kuro Usagi-san. About previous topic, properly speaking, the Gift Games are the games of gods and demons that are only held within Little Garden.....that's how it is, right?"

"Eh? Ah, yes."

"However, we encountered the monster that looked like Minotaur back in our world. Us coming to Little Garden was caused from such inevitable circumstances.....Putting it another way, it would be no more than taking shelter in Little Garden as a result of getting rolled up in its Game. I think there's plenty of reasons to be able to return to the former world."

.....Umumu, Kuro Usagi twist her usamimi.

Kudou Ayato continued her question with stronger tone.

“Why did something like this happen in the first place? I think we won’t arrive to a solution if we don’t clarify that part.”

“I-I’m sorry. That part is difficult for even Kuro Usagi to understand. The only thing I can say, is that perhaps this situation happened as a result of the preliminary game of that large-scale Gift Game held in Little Garden.....The Second Sun Authority War running wild. I don’t know anything else.”

Homura bit his lip to divert his impatience. The only aim for him was to make the livelihood of the orphanage enjoyable after finally progressing the results of his research.

But in one swing, that changed to survival crisis. It was no wonder he became impatient.

Kuro Usagi hung her head with usamimi down in shame.

“It’s unfortunate, but you have no choice but to clear this subjugation Game for now. No matter what kind of situation it was, you have agreed to the invitation letter, so.....Before starting the negotiations, you have to first clear the Game.”

“B-But, even if you say to defeat an ox monster like that, there’s no way we could win!”

Unable to endure, Suzuka also raised her voice.

Two monsters that appeared at evening.....They were the existences that have went beyond human knowledge. It could be said that the mysterious Cumulonimbus ox was a monster of a scale living up to it’s title as a Celestial Beast.

This goes without saying, but it wasn’t an opponent they could fight and win against.

With this, it was extremely unlikely for them to be able to return to their former world.

As the three of them were being silent, Kuro Usagi suddenly told them as her usamimi perked up.

“.....Ah, that’s right. In this case, there’s no need to need to defeat it with some kind of power!”

“Eh?”

“In subjugation games with powerful ability opponents as a target, aside from power, there’s also the method of fighting with the means intelligence! The opponent is the Avatar of Taurus.....For example, since the target is Minotaur, then there should be a method of subjugation in its legends!”

Usaa! Kuro Usagi raised here usamimi.

From those words, even Homura was taken aback and folded his arms.

“I-Is that so. According to the previous conversation, monsters in Little Garden assume the form of legends. In that case, if we investigate Minotaur’s legend, we might find the way to beat it.....!”

As if finding a ray of hope, Homura raised his face and looked at Kuro Usagi.

“Kuro Usagi. The previously mentioned Sun Authority, what is it? Would it be fine to consider it as some kind of Gift with terrific power?”

“YES! Even within the countless Gifts, Sun Authorities are ranked as the highest class. There exist 24 types of them, and while they are respectively strong arms, they are also the mediums required to summon the Celestial Beasts!”

Kuro Usagi explained with raised usamimi.

Homura started to ponder as if realizing something.

“Just by reading this invitation, this Game involves Taurus of Twelve Ecliptic Constellations, right?”

“YES, it’s as you say!”

“I see. So that’s why there were Minotaur and “Taurus” huh. Indeed, if all these was caused by the Gift Game, then it all makes sense.”

Homura took a serious expression and put hand to his chin.

That expression was even more tensed than until now, however there was no despair in it like before. Homura who was a quick thinker, started to collected

the chain of events that happened until yesterday in high speed.

“Typhoon.....agricultural damage.....since it came to that, next would be famine, huh? But, there are already measures against that. The second clinical trial have been passed so the distribution of medical-use Nanomachines should start within a few days. The question is what happened to the typhoon number 24 and where is the Minotaur.”

While tapping on table with his finger, he announced the conclusion.

Homura who breathed a big sigh, despite sweating a little, still displayed his best smile.

“.....Okay! Suzuka, Ayato! We might actually have a chance to win!”

“Really?”

“Is that true?”

“Yes. It was by accident, but I have brought the trump card with me.”

Suzuka looked slightly puzzled from Homura’s remark.

As if noticing something, Ayato asked him with a tensed expression.

“Senpai. Could it be.....that you plan to use the remaining “Origins”?”

“I don’t have another choice do I. The study is still at 10% stage, but we still have “Origin” stocks. It should be fine to use just one of them. But, what’s left is the means to return to our former world.....Does Kuro Usagi have some kind of idea?”

Homura turned towards Kuro Usagi.

Meeting his gaze, Kuro Usagi also made up her mind.

“.....I see, I understood the story! If you are determined so much, then albeit not much, Kuro Usagi will also lend you a hand!”

“Is there a way?”

“YES! I think meeting with “Queen Halloween” who has summoned you first would be a good idea!”

Homura and Suzuka tilted their heads in wonder at the words that came out

from Kuro Usagi..

““Queen Halloween”.....Yeah, now that you mentioned it, there was such mail address. So that person is the summoner?”

“YES! She isn’t someone who comes out in public much.....But generally, she is referred to as Golden Haired Queen Who Governs the World’s Boundary.”

“Governs the World’s Boundary?”

“YES, or would it be better if I say she is the one deified at Halloween Festival. To start with, do any of you know the meaning behind the festival known as Halloween?”

“No, I don’t know the details.”

Homura and Suzuka exchanged glances and shook their heads at the same time.

Then, we have to start the explanation from there.

*Gohon*, as Kuro Usagi cleared her throat, she raised one finger and puffed up her chest.

—“*Halloween*” was the festival of Sun worshipping and celebrating the harvest performed by ancient Celts that have existed in Western Europe. The ancient Celts viewed the movement of the Sun and difference in its shine throughout the year as a cycle of life and death, and worshipped the Sun that had started to weaken when it neared the fall from summer, as an existence that would be reborn as a new life after dying in winter.

*The ancient Celts believed that on October 31 which is the Sun weakening boundary, the boundary of the world itself would become unstable, and ancestral spirits would come crossing from the kingdom of the dead. However, the ancestral spirits weren’t the only ones crossing over from the kingdom of the dead, fearing that man-eating fiends would come together with ancestral spirits again, they have defended themselves by mimicking monsters in appearance.*

“Aha. So you mean that by deifying that, it became known as the Queen Who Governs the Boundaries?”

“YES! Furthermore, even in this Little Garden where war gods and deities

gather, “Queen Halloween” is someone who is referred to as a sole “Queen”. I think she would know the way to return! And in a few days, you would have a chance to meet Queen here in “Underwood”.”

“Really!?”

Suzuka raised her voice. Raising her usamimi, Kuro Usagi responded.

“YES! Actually, the water of this “Underwood” is famous for it’s cleanness, and it seems that it goes well with Queen’s favorite black tea. She desires the morning dew in particular, which couldn’t be gathered beyond few droplets, and Queen’s errand person comes once in a month.”

“Once in a month.....When’s the next time?”

“Conveniently, she should be coming at night tomorrow. If all goes well, it might be possible for Queen to mediate.”

With Kuro Usagi’s proposal, Homura’s and Suzuka’s faces brightened and they stood up.

“Okay. Now that our objective is decided, we can’t stick around and wait.”

“Uisa! We have to earn to cover our living expenses!”

“.....Senpai. Suzuka. Do you have anything that could be used as a replacement for the participation fee?”

Receiving Ayato’s calm tsukkomi, the two became silent.

Kuro Usagi smiled gently and raised her hand.

“Please don’t worry. Two of you are Izayoi-san’s family. The family of our benefactor so to speak. Participation fees will be covered from Kuro Usagi’s pocket money!”

“Ooh, Kuro Usa is so generous!”

“Sorry for the trouble, we’ll definitely return it after we earn. I want to first practice with an easy looking Game, but what should I do I wonder?”

“In that case, the shop from a while ago looked nice! Surely it must be a stage for Gift Games——”

“Wait a minuteeeee!”

At that moment, a giant pillar of water raised up from the great river. Seeming to misunderstand that it was some kind of show, the surrounding audience started to applause with smiles on their faces.

It was a serious matter however to the people in question that were nearby it. They got entirely soaked by the river water, and the cuisine on the table got washed away as well.

“Ah.....”

Large part of the cuisine went to the river, not even half of which was eaten yet. Suzuka looked at that with pain. However, the figure that came flying out of the great river, swept down before Homura and others without a care.

“I have heard your conversation! This Shirayuki-Hime will be in charge of your first Gift Game!

“S-Shirayuki-sama! Why did you make such meaningless, troublesome and flashy entrance!?”

“I don’t understand it well, but probably she wanted to look cool.”

“That’s right, Senpai. I can’t think of anything else.”

“S-Such tasty-looking meal was sacrificed for such selfish reason.....!”

“S-Stop fussing! As one of the Divinity holders, first impression is important! Establishing a hierarchical relationship from the start is essential, isn’t it!?”

Ugaa!!! Shirayuki-Hime, girl dressed in kimono bared her fangs in anger.

As she suddenly glared towards Homura, she pointed at him loaded with all her hostility.

“You there! I thought there were some signs of resemblance, but you really are Master’s younger brother it seems!”

“Master.....? Is this about Iza-nii? In that case, Suzuka is the same.”

Umu? Shirayuki-hime bend her head.

“.....Nunu? Can’t see that, but alright. All of you seem to be the inhabitants of Master’s homeland. If that’s the case, I will use you to clear away all the humiliations I have gotten from him!”

“““I refuse.”””

“Okay, with this, you really are that big fool’s acquaintances!!!”

I have predicted this level of development!!!—In complete high tension, Shirayuki-Hime made up her mind. Then suddenly, she glared at Kuro Usagi next.

“Kuro Usagi-dono. I heard the full story. No matter if they are a family of a friend, giving them money for free isn’t good, don’t you think. Three of them are children of tender years if you look at them. At that age, giving it for free would be bad for their education.”

“W-What.....!? That was an unexpectedly sound argument, to the point that I’m lost for words.....!”

“It really doesn’t feel like the words that would come from a fellow who caused great inconvenience to the guests some time ago.”

Homura threw a fair tsukkomi towards the fair argument. Shirayuki-Hime naturally ignored it.

“So. For gaining experience in Gift Games, shouldn’t this Shirayuki-Hime invite these three to the Gift Game personally?”

Shirayuki-Hime made a self-satisfied face while bearing her fangs. Kuro Usagi became greatly perplexed while muttering something like “I feel that Shirayuki-sama took resemblance to a certain someone as of late”.

Homura and Suzuka exchange glances in wonder, but the answer was decided.

“Well, we still don’t know what exactly Gift Games are. I am indeed grateful, but.”

“Would we receive the reward with that?”

“Of course. I will prepare a spare Gift.”

Umu umu, Shirayuki-Hime nodded as if enjoying it. Hearing that, Homura and Suzuka likewise consented to this with smiles.

Despite holding a significant suspicion, Kuro Usagi leaked a sigh without

saying a thing.

“Understood. In that case, Kuro Usagi will act as a judge.”

“Judge? Kuro Usagi will?”

“YES! Even if it doesn’t look that way, Kuro Usagi is the “Aristocrat of Little Garden” who has been bestowed with “Judge Master”! Within Kuro Usagi’s hearing range, no one will be able to cheat!”

*Usaa!* Kuro Usagi raised her usamimi. If that was true, then it saved the trouble of worrying about cheating. Shirayuki-Hime jumped in the great river once more, and appeared with the shape of a giant serpent.

『.....Umu. Now then, get on. I’ll take you along to the stage area.』

“Yess!”

“Going underwater on the way is a no go.”

Suzuka obediently replied, while Homura looked slightly suspicious, still looked to be enjoying it somewhat.

Kuro Usagi gave a sidelong glance to the girl who kept her calm in contrast to those lively two—Kudou Ayato.

“Well, then, we shall go as well. .....By the way, Ayato-san.”

“What is it, Kuro Usagi-san.”

“I was thinking that maybe.....Have we met somewhere before?”

“—..... No, this is our first meeting.”

She replied with a calm, emotionless tone. Kuro Usagi showed a lonely smile for an instant.

“No, in that case, never mind. —Now, Let’s head towards Shirayuki-sama’s game!”

Her skirt swaying, Kuro Usagi stood up.

The three of them also stood up vigorously, and their exploration of “Underwood” had begun.

\*

—“Underwood Stage Area” Hippocamp Pastures.

It was the aquatic pastures, where beautiful shining water droplets trickled down from the leaves of the Great Tree. Perhaps the livestock were allowed to run freely here and there on the lands, because there was no need to worry about them running away. It was natural for cattle and pigs, but surprisingly, even the livestock like sheep and goats who could swim, didn’t seem like they would run away, taking their children with them.

While Saigou Homura, Ayazato Suzuka and Kudou Ayato were sightseeing that scenery, their eyes were still directed ahead towards Shirayuki-hime.

Suzuka raised her voice as if she saw something really strange.

“W-Wait Homura. That carriage, isn’t it running on the river’s surface?”

She pointed at the water cart while shaking Homura’s shoulder. The body of that cart looked like it was floating above water itself—Saying it bluntly, it looked just like a ship.

However its driving power wasn’t relying on the wind to sail, nor an oar paddled by a grim boatman.

A seahorse with fish-like fins attached in front of its hooves—A half horse-half fish Eudemon commonly known as “Hippocamp” was running gracefully on water.

“Ooh.....!!!”

“How is it, brother. Even the hull is pretty, as one would expect, that’s amazing, isn’t it?”

“Umu. It’s not half-bad.”

You liar! Suzuka tsukkomi’d lightly.

Kuro Usagi asked to Ayato while giggling.

“Homura-san sure is an obstinate person.”

“He’s usually a bit more honest. It’s because Senpai tends to dislike showing his childish side.”

“Hohou, then you mean to say that he is originally childish? Fufu, he is similar to Izayoi-san in that aspect.”

“Oi, the Kouhai and Loli Usagi over there. I can hear you.”

Erasing his former expression, Homura knit his brows sullenly.

Kuro Usagi and Ayato were still giggling, but Suzuka remonstrated that with wry smile.

“Now now. Despite how it looks, he’s still the eldest of the orphanage. After looking after younger children, he became like this before one knew.”

“Orphanage?.....E, Eh? But Homura-san and Izayoi-san are...”

“Not related by blood. Just from the same orphanage.”

“Eh, But.....E-Ehh?”

Kuro Usagi looked puzzled as her usamimi tilted.

But at that moment, they had arrived to their destination.

『Let’s drop off here for the moment.』

Saying so, Shirayuki-hime bend her head towards the land. As the four of them came down one by one, Shirayuki-hime dived underwater. And jumped out in a human form after a moment.

“Now... As you can see, this area is a feeding ground for the livestock, and will be the area for the Game. While on the way to here, you saw a “Hippocamp” right?”

“Yes. We just passed it.”

“Nu.....? Ah. That did happen. I was thinking of doing a Gift Game using water carts, what do you say?”

Oohh! Homura and Suzuka raised their voices. As expected, they didn’t consider that she’d set up such an interesting-looking game.

Kudou Ayato alone was calm, but even her expression had softened into a smile.

“That seems interesting. Are we going to perform a water race?”

“As expected, there are too few people for a race here. But well, there’s a special race known as “Rider of Hippocamp” being held here periodically.”

“YES! The game that was held three years ago gained a good reputation, and is now performed as a regular festival race. Sometimes, Kuro Usagi is invited there as a judge as well.”

“Houhou. W-Will that be held in near future or...”

“It won’t. It is being held once a month and the last one happened just 3 days ago.”

Ayazato Suzuka became clearly dejected from Shirayuki-Hime’s words.

While being at loss towards her whose emotions were even more apparent than herself, she still made a follow-up in a hurry.

“B-But you know, we will perform a similar Game now, right?”

“Umu. Although it’s not a group race, I’m thinking of us racing through the downtown waterway, an obstacle race.”

“Oh.....It’s more large-scaled Game than I expected. Is it alright to use it for personal business like this?”

“Fortunately, I lend a hand in various ways for the stability of the Aquatic City of “Underwood” so I have a lot of influence. Even if we cause trouble, no one would get angry. —Now then, read this.”

As Shirayuki-Hime clapped her hands, a single parchment fell down.

## 『Gift Game – “Water Rider of Hippocamp” –

- **Entry Qualifications: Ones invited by the Host.**
- **Winning Condition: Finish a lap around the Great Tree faster than Host “Shirayuki-Hime.**
- **Rule Summary**

**First: Players are allowed to look at the map and choose a favorite route.**

**Second: Host has the freedom to choose the route, however they have to stop when raising the head above water.**

**Third: In case the Player is turned over, they are allowed to continue from that place if they immediately get reorganized.**

**Fourth: You can interfere with the opponent at fixed intervals.**

**- Player Victory Reward: Awarding of one Gift Card. As well as the guarantee of daily necessities.**

**- Host Victory Reward: Persuasion of Sakamaki Izayoi to apologize for all the rudeness until now.**

**Oath: Respecting the above stated rules, we swear upon our Glory and Flag to host the Gift Game.**

**“No Name” Shirayuki-Hime Stamp】**

Three of them quickly read through the letter and asked Kuro Usagi.

“What’s this? The game rules?”

“YES! It’s a “Geass Roll” that represents the Game Rules of Little Garden. If you agree to the terms after reading them, then please convey it to the Host.”

Fumu, Homura began to think. There were many things to be asked, but before that, there was something that he absolutely had to ascertain.

“About this “You can interfere with the opponent at fixed intervals”, does it mean distance? or is it time duration?”

“It’s time duration. You can interfere with the opponent at fixed time intervals. In addition, the moment when interfering is possible, is a secret of the

Host."

".....You mean to be on defensive at first and search for it, huh. Then what's the stock of rights to interfere?"

"There isn't. If there was, wouldn't it be disadvantageous to the Host?"

"Eeh. Let's be fair there."

"Suzuka. Host is undertaking the Game without compensation, and is offering a reward. It might be somewhat unfair, but even if you take that away, this is quite a warm hearted Game."

Ayato rebuked Suzuka. That also weighed on Homura's mind.

Taking into consideration that this was their first game, this victory reward was too gracious compared to this level of risk and difficulty. Was there any ulterior motives.....He didn't consider that either.

"..... I'll hear you out just in case. About this sentence, "Persuasion of Sakamaki Izayoi to apologize for all the rudeness until now." Just what did that guy do?"

"—..... It'll get prolonged if I talk about it. It's to the extent that the day would darken and the clean water of "Underwood" would be dyed dark red by my resentment and anger."

"Ah, Okay."

"U-Uhm, I'm sorry?"

For some reason, the two of them suddenly became apologetic. Homura and others were also plenty manipulated by Izayoi, but it seemed as a resident of Little Garden, he had caused several times more trouble.

"Gohon. We strayed from topic, but shall we begin about now? Use whichever water cart you like. Next, it would be great if there was a "Hippocamp" who would be willing to help, but....."

Saying so, Shirayuki-Hime reviewed the surroundings.

Just at that moment, one of the "Hippocamp" from their group came rushing with terrific force. That "Hippocamp" who came rushing towards this direction,

stuck out its head in the gap between Suzuka and Ayato as if charging.

“Waa!”

“-You are.....!”

As Suzuka fell behind from the surprise, Ayato looked at that “Hippocamp” while easily stopping it. That horse was beautiful even among all “Hippocamp”.

Its blue firm limbs were moderately trained, and had the semi-transparent dorsal fin that was green in color, growing instead of its mane. Getting wet by the river water, it seemed to be shining from the dazzling rays of sun.

As Suzuka looked at the dorsal fin from the side, the dazzling shine hit her eyes. Towards that beauty of its body that looked just like a living sculpture, she leaked a sigh of admiration without thinking.

“A.....Amazingly beautiful.....!”

“Yes. I’m an amateur with horses, but such beauty isn’t easy to find, right?”

“Umu. This fellow is called Hyutos, and is the king of “Hippocamp” herd. It was leading a campaign as a horse of a Queen’s Knight until three years ago.”

“Queen’s Knight.....you mean the previously mentioned “Queen Halloween”?”

“YES! She was a really strong and brave knight who has saved Kuro Usagi and others many times. And this “Hippocamp” was one of the competitors of Izayoi-san and others in the “Hippocamp Rider” three years ago!”

*Hihin*, Hyutos responded by raising a neigh. While scratching it gently under its neck, Ayato muttered with delightful voice.

“.....It’s been a while, Hyutos. You seem as lively as ever.”

*Hihin*, the “Hippocamp” Hyutos responded seemingly happy.

After nodding exaggeratedly, Shirayuki-Hime handed over the “Geass Roll” together with a town map.

“The preparations are finished. What do you say we start the race tomorrow at around noon?”

“That much would be plenty for preparations. —Ah, that’s right.

Incidentally, there's one thing I'd like to ask."

Looking around the surroundings, Homura saw several water carts.

Then, ascertained "Hippocamp" Hyutos' build and grinned.

"This water cart.....would it be a problem to design it myself?"

"Hou. Do you have confidence?"

"Yeah. Rather, this is my strong point. Of course, I would think of other measures if I don't make it in time."

"YES! In that case, Homura-san would plan the blueprint, and let's ask the tree spirits to assemble it! If we do that, we will make it in a flash without doubt!"

Okay, Happily nodded Homura.

Seeing Homura looking happier beyond their expectations, Mutually, Ayato and Suzuka suppressed their smiles.

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<sup>1</sup> Konjaku Monogatarishū (今昔物語集, lit. Anthology of Tales from the Past) an anthology of over one thousand tales written during the late Heian period (794–1185). See the notes of the Volume 1 V2 (note 22) for more. ↪

## Chapter 6

On the morning of the second day, Sakamaki Izayoi and Mikado Tokuteru went to the French cuisine restaurant, “Don Bruno”, that was situated near the orphanage. It was because of Tokuteru’s strong demand to “fill his stomach” that they have come to this place. However, as they have reached the front it, Izayoi stared at the curtains of the door bitterly.

“..... Are we really going in there? It’s not even open yet, is it?”

“It won’t be a problem. Don and Madam are rather generous. Not to mention that the dishes here are also rather delicious.”

“I know that more than anyone. I have been coming here since I was a kid.”

“Isn’t that just perfect? Such coincidences don’t happen twice, so, why don’t we just enter with a sense of nostalgia?”

Just like that, Tokuteru opened the curtains of the door as he dragged Izayoi along. Due to its old fashioned appearance from outside, it was hard to imagine that the decorations inside were all features of modern art.

Looking at it positively, it would be described as a stylish store with strong characteristics. While in a negative light, a shop that was completely devoted to one’s hobbies.

—To build a castle that only belongs to me. Such passion was conveyed deeply.

At the counter of this shop of strong characteristics, sat a grim white haired chef with a cigarette and had just spread out a newspaper.

Seemingly displeased, he gazed towards the two guests who had just entered the restaurant an hour earlier before its opening time in a blue funk.

Realizing who the two guests were, his displeasure grew as he smacked his lips.

“...What on earth is with today. Just when I thought you guys were some

acquaintances that I have not met for ages, turns out it was just the return of the two problem children. Leave, there's no food here for someone who doesn't know etiquette or understands gratitude."

"Hey Izayoi, he was talking to you."

"Shut up. Half of that was about you...Well, I am well aware that I am ungrateful. Long time no see, Don Bruno. Shouldn't you quit smoking already?"

"Hmph, don't be a busybody. Now it has just become my hobby at most."

Don Bruno's face that was filled with wrinkles began to purse, with his facial expression looking more and more terrible.

If you took a good look at him from the front, the fact that he was from the Western Europe could easily be distinguished. However, with his facial expression along with the traces of labor on his face, was of the so-called stubborn father in Japan.

As he stood up, he turned his shoulder and asked for their order while looking bothered.

"So, what do you want to eat? Would the usual pumpkin quiche be fine?"

"Yeah. Rather, that would be great. After all, the pumpkin quiche made by you is the best in France."

*Hmph*, with a snort, Don Bruno returned to the kitchen.

As Izayoi and Tokuteru sat down on their seats within the restaurant, it was followed by a question, Tokuteru asked as he smiled.

"Well well, you seem to be quite close to him. Are there some special circumstances behind it?"

"I guess so. I first met him when I was still travelling with Canaria in the Western Europe. Since then, it has been 5 years..... No, with accordance to the

time of this world, 7 years.”

Izayoi’s bitter expression from before had vanished without a trace, and had his eye glued towards the kitchen happily. Even Tokuteru, who was not really close to Izayoi, was able to understand just how rare this sight was.

“How’s it? Coming here was a good decision right?”

“Don’t get me wrong. It’s not that I didn’t want to come. I simply didn’t want to violate your righteousness and creed.”

“Is it. Then, let’s get to the main point right here.....confidentially speaking, how much do you know about this Game in question?”

Tokuteru put away his smile and asked in a low voice. The reason why he chose to enter this store before its opening time was probably because he didn’t want anyone in the surrounding to hear this. Leaning against his chair, Izayoi answered with both of his arm crossed.

“Even if you ask ‘how much’... It has only been 3 days since I was summoned back onto this world, and all I have learnt was that a Celestial Beast had escaped. Instead, you should be the one who has heard something about it.”

“No, there’s nothing I have heard. I have said this many times already, but the reason why we came here was totally due to other reasons. You can think of it as something that is unrelated to the Sun Authority War.”

Tokuteru Mikado asserted. If there’s no news from the Little Garden, obtaining any more information about the matter would prove to be difficult.

“...Seriously. You are such a useless god.”

“Don’t say it like that. I am already aware of it.”

With this, they were in a deadlock. Without some topic, the discussion couldn’t be carried on.

Izayoi started to look around his surroundings, and picked up the newspaper Don Bruno was reading just now, spread it onto the table and turned a page.

After flipping to the page regarding the report of the recent typhoon, he pointed towards the situation of the damages.

“Over two millions families have been victim of this incident, huh...Jeez, it has really caused quite a lot of troubles in this world. Excuse me for my selfish desire, but I want to settle this debt with my own hands.”

“I understand your anger, however, our main priority now is to have a discussion on finding a way for you to return. We will do something about the issues in the outside world. With the Celestial Beast returned to Little Garden, dealing with the aftermath is our duty—”

At this moment, the store’s door opened with the clanking sounds.

A tanned woman could be seen sticking out her head through a crack in the door.

“Please excuse me for entering before opening hours, but may I know if Tokuteru is here?”

“Hm? Oh, Is that you Prith? I’m here.”

Tokuteru called out to Prith, the woman who was peeking in.

After hearing the name, Izayoi started to doubt if he had heard wrong.

Taishakuten

“Prith...“Prithvi Mata”<sup>[1]</sup>? Oi oi, not only You , but to think that even this great mother goddess has come. No matter how you look at it, this is definitely overpowering. What are you plotting?”

Although Izayoi was rather offensive in his speech, Prith answered him while giggling as she held her chin.

“It was rude of you to call it ‘plotting’, Sakamaki Izayoi. All we have been doing is just living normally in this world.”

“That’s right. She’s just a staff from my company. Just an ordinary and exceptional staff.”

“Even shamelessness has a limit. When two of the infamous strongest war gods, The 12 Devas are assembled here, I think it would be pretty normal to think that something fishy is going on.”

From Izayoi’s comment, the two Devas started to giggle as they tried to hold in their laughters. They were the Divine Spirits who have created a community

that was prominent even among the many gods of Little Garden.

The name of these gods was, “Twelve Deva Guardians”.

The strongest group of Gods, built mainly through the gathering of war gods who are widely believed in the countries of Asia.

Prithvi Mata, was counted as one of the oldest goddesses within the many gods in India.

Although she was known as the goddess of fertility after the separation of Heaven and Earth, the true nature of her spirit rank did not lie there.

To spread the agriculture since the dawn of humanity, this is her true nature—That is, to act as the god who's responsible for the origin of human civilization. Living under the sky as one of the twelve heavenly gods, and settle such abnormal state of agriculture was probably one of her missions too.

“I too have heard the stories of your heroism, Sakamaki Izayoi. The Hero who was summoned 3 years ago in Little Garden, including the demon lord of Zoroastrianism, “Azi Dahaka”, you have already defeated a total of 5 demon lords.”

“That is an honor...Or so I want to say, but I was not the only one who defeated him.”

“I know. All I’m saying is that your name as their representative has become well known.”

“..... There is some inaccuracy in your words, but forget it.”

As Izayoi felt that it would become too troublesome if he continued on this topic, he gave up on it. While Prith giggled as if she enjoyed this and then sat while pointing towards the article.

“Let’s end this chit-chat here. I have just confirmed the traces left behind by ‘The Bull of Heaven’ who was on a rampage.”

“Incredible, a competent woman is indeed different from others. So, what’s the situation?”

“The source came from a sea in the South American continent, from where it traveled north of the coastline and to the island of Crete. However, it did not

land on the interior of Europe, and instead, it hit West and Southeast Asia and headed straight towards Japan."

"Mhm. So far it's the same as the article. How about the rumored virus and agriculture damages?"

"In general, the virus has a high infection rate. From the symptoms shown, the disease was smallpox that could even infect plants."

"Smallpox? Isn't that disease supposed to be extinct?"

"Oh, is it?"

Prith asked in wonder. It seems that she was not familiar with modern history.

Especially because India, the country she governed, had a fortuitous history with the hardship of smallpox. Hence, the astonishment.

Izayoi scratched his head and explained the matter of that aspect.

—Smallpox.

A disease that rivaled the Black Death disease and the Spanish flu, one of the viruses that had caused countless deaths.

Not only was it an air-borne infection, but also a deadly virus with over a 40% mortality rate that could even spread by physical contact with wounds or pus. Once infected, even after making a complete recovery from it, the ugly marks would be left on the skin, scarring the patients physically and mentally. There's a famous story in Japan, where Date Masamune had one of his eyes robbed by the smallpox, which has become an anecdote.

"It seems that for the eradication of the smallpox, a similar virus known as cowpox was used, infecting the people with it beforehand and making patients immune. I heard that the only remains of it are being kept under strict supervision in the research facilities."

"...Ho. So it was a type of disease that was similar to cowpox, which only occurs on cows."

Ahem. The three of them fell silent.

The matter this time was related to the Sun Authorities - The Twelve Ecliptic

## Constellations.

Within the “Twelve Ecliptic Constellations”, the twelve Celestial Beasts consisted are: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces.

And within the “Twelve Chén of the Equator”: Mouse, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig.

These twenty-four Celestial Beasts that exist within the Sun’s Orbit, are generally referred to as the Sun Authorities.

“The rampaging Taurus trial this time is roughly divided into two kinds. One of which is the Game “Monster of the Labyrinth” based on the Minotaur from Greek mythology.”

Minotaur—A bull monster that was quoted in several varieties of works even in Japan, was originally a monster of Greek Myth that had been passed down from the floating island above the Aegean Sea, Crete.

In the mythology, it was said that the king who reigned over the island of Crete that time was given a beautiful bull temporarily from the God of the Sea, Poseidon. However, as the King began to obsess over the beauty of the bull, he violated the contract he had with Poseidon, keeping the beautiful sea bull to himself.

The sea god was angered by the King’s action and thus placed a curse on the Queen of Crete, causing her to fall in love with the sea bull. Eventually, the Queen ordered the famous craftsmen of the country to disguise her appearance as a cow, realizing her love with the sea bull.

As a result, the Queen gave birth to a half-bull, half-human bull monster.

The child Queen gave birth to, was temporarily given the name of his ancestor “Asterius”, but was later renamed to “Minotaur”.

Minotaur was hence imprisoned by the King into an inescapable labyrinth, to only be killed off by the Hero Theseus who sneaked into the maze as a crusade, closing the curtains of this legend.

“And the other one of which used ‘The Bull of Heaven’, a bull which appeared

in the Epic of Gilgamesh, a poem that has been passed down by the ancient Mesopotamian civilization. Both of these are Gift Games of immense difficulty and strength...But I would never have thought that these two would be held at the same time."

Especially the Celestial Beast of the latter... 'The Bull of Heaven', is a Celestial Beast that could reveal its threat especially in this modern society. Within the records, it was said that once 'The Bull of Heaven' descend upon the world, there would be seven years of famine.

Within the records of Gilgamesh, the bull was originally referred to as 'The Bull of Heaven<sup>[2]</sup>', However, this is probably due to the constellation being Taurus.

Thinking up to that point, Izayoi muttered as if he had noticed something.

"Heavy storm, smallpox, famine...thinking about it now, rather than just the appearance of "The Bull of Heaven", every natural disaster that were recorded in Gilgamesh's Epic are manifesting one by one."

"The heavy storms are the flood that ended the world. The smallpox is the skin disease that the demon beast, Humbaba, has cursed to spread. The famine that is likely to happen in the future is 'The Bull of Heaven' huh?"

"While there are various theories on curses, a theory about King Gilgamesh's death being due to smallpox also exists. The problem we face now is that the scale this time being more vicious than in the epic."

"This could be due to the difference in human population between the past and present. Try to compare the two situations where ancient Uruk is an arena and the present world is also an arena. In order for both games to bring about the same gameplay, don't you think the power of this degree would be necessary?"

"Well, taking into account the original spirit rank of the Celestial Beast, it would be natural for it to have that degree of power."

So it is. Izayoi crossed his arms, and started to digest the contents of this discussion.

In the end, although the original spirit rank of this Celestial Beast was

different from this, but in accordance to the Gift Game that followed the legend, it seems that there was a regulation of power to a certain extent.

Yet, it was rampaging in this outer world, revealing its enormous power.

“Ahem...But if that’s so, it’s fortunate for us that it has returned back to Little Garden. If it had remained here forever, the level of damage that would happen to this world would be catastrophic.”

“Indeed. The outside world is really narrow in comparison to Little Garden.”

“It’s true in our territory. But if this is a recurring Gift Game of the legend, the game of “The Bull Of Heaven” would probably last for seven years. Taking into account the speed of infection and disease, humanity might really have perished.”

Izayoi frowned after he heard Prith’s words.

“...Is it really that bad?”

“Very bad. Although the damage done by the typhoon was huge, the damage done to the crops is what’s really bad. In my judgement, that type of virus would stay within the soil for a while.”

“Oi oi, don’t you dare joke with me. Having the virus left in the soil is the worst outcome that one could expect.”

“Exactly. While we thought that “The Bull of Heaven” was the embodiment of a drought, in actuality, it seems that it was actually the embodiment of famine. It must have judged that the best way to give rise to famine in this era was to suppress the key, the earth.”

How terrible this was. If this was true, then stating that the damage dealt at the present stage was devastating would not be an exaggeration.

Yet, Tokuteru ignored the serious expressions shown on the two faces and laughed suggestively.

“What are you guys so serious about, that issue has already been dealt with. I have stated that Homura has already took measures against this virus. It will not be long before this issue would be solved.”

“Oh? That boy from that day?”

“You have said that before, but will it really be fine?”

“Jeez, there’s no need for worries. After all, he——Uh, sorry. A call from Uesugi.”

A tone that sounded like the heart sutra was suddenly projected within the store. As one would expect, even Izayoi and Prith couldn’t help but reveal smiles.

“What a ‘great’ taste you have...Or rather, Uesugi from the company of Twelve Deva Guardians... could it be,”

“Being too observant is bad for you, Sakamaki Izayoi.”

Prith revealed a mischievous smile of an adult, and put a finger on her lips. Izayoi was at a loss, but shrugged as he laughed.

“Okay, okay, I get it. I understand that even Gods have spare time to spend.”

“Yeah, especially after you went and defeated the ‘Last Embryo’”

The giggle that the Earth Goddess gave contained traces of gratitude and playfulness. At first glance, she looked like a woman with strict persona, but it turned out that she was unexpectedly friendly.

In this steady mood——The hard-faced chef, Don Bruno, brought out the two pumpkin quiches.

“What? Prith, you came too? If you had called me earlier, I would have prepared a third share.”

“Don’t mind it, Don Bruno. I am okay with taking Tokuteru’s share.”

“Okay, just take it. This is all Tokuteru’s fault for not telling me that you were coming.”

After Don Bruno’s consent, Prith stretched her arm towards Tokuteru’s pumpkin quiche without any hesitation. Izayoi’s eyes were also shining, laughing heartily as he stared at the quiche that just been taken out of the

oven.

—Quiche was one of the local dishes common within parts of Europe, but by no means was it a high end cuisine. It would be better to say that it is one of the most popular dishes among the locals.

The wafting sweet aroma of the freshly baked pumpkin quiche and steaming pie dough made Izayoi unconsciously breath a sigh.

“Damn...It’s nice to come back once in awhile. Thanks to that, I can taste the world’s best quiche once more.”

“Don’t be loquacious, you damn brat. You probably brought along some trouble as you returned, didn’t you? It would be fine if you were to die by the roadside, but don’t drag the kids in the orphanage along with you. For wanderers, it’s the most basic etiquette to kick the bucket without causing trouble to their homeplace.”

“..... Yeah, I’ll be careful.”

He opened his mouth just slightly and put the pumpkin quiche in it. For Izayoi, this flavor hadn’t changed a bit after three years, and was tasty as ever.

—The same taste, but with a bit of bitterness.

Oh how he’d like to live well as Don Bruno said, but at the same time, he also swore that he would make the person behind the incident taste ten thousand times the bitterness.

“Sorry, Don. Since you are good at taking care of people, have you been taking care of those in the orphanage?”

“...Well. We don’t really contact out of goodwill. But well, until I have cleared all my debt I had with Canaria, I will keep being in touch with them. Or else, I wouldn’t be able to come up with an explanation when I go to hell.”

Don Bruno scratched his head as he returned back to the kitchen.

Then, Tokuteru who had just returned after his call was stunned as he saw the empty plates on the table.

“Ugh, Oi, wait a minute! Where’s my salted pie!?”

“Thank you for your hospitality. It was delicious, boss.”

“Well, it would be a waste if someone as useless as you were to eat it.”

Izayoi laughed, and Prith grinned as she tried to hold in her laughter.

After awhile of indignation, Tokuteru ordered another plate of salted pie.

\*

“Underwood’s Stage Area” Before the entrance of the Spirit Train.

“...? Has the weather gotten worse?”

The sunny weather since yesterday had suddenly disappeared, and the it began to deteriorate severely.

Dark clouds were gathering in the skies above the great tree, and even the traces of lightning could be seen. Yet, the city was filled with noises from the citizens, nagging about when will the game begin. Seats were already prepared without one’s knowledge.

Ayato gave a smile, and sat on the back of the “Hippocamp” Hyutos.

“Looks like the landlords have gathered quite a number of audiences. Their business spirits are strong as ever.”

“Hehe. Although we can’t reject and there’s no pay for it.”

“Well, who knows? It’s possible that Miss Shirayuki-san might have already made some kind of negotiation with them. After all, we are free to use the waterway of the city, so she must be making the necessary arrangements.”

“That’s right, about that Shirayuki-san. But, Kuro Usa is the “Moon Rabbit” from Buddhist Tales right? In that case, could Shirayuki-san be the ‘Snow White’ from Grimm’s fairy tales?”

“No, I think that’s not quite correct.”

Homura shook his head, and tapped his head as if he had recalled something.

“Body of a giant serpent, a Japanese style Kimono. Also the name Shirayuki-hime. There’s no mistake, she must be Shirayuki-hime from one of Kyoka Izumi’s famous works, YashaGa-Ike.<sup>[3]</sup>”

“Kyoka Izumi’s YashaGa-Ike...Oh, that. The legend of a Dragon God on which the anecdote about human sacrifice is based on, right?”

“That’s the one. It seemed closer to the Grimm’s fairy tale because she said something about being a divinity holder, right?”

“So...she is the Water God right? .....This is getting tricky. Although the ‘Hippocamp’ are running on water, but in actuality they are controlling the water pressure to move forward. If a whirlpool or a waterspout were to appear, it would cause us to lose quite some time.”

What should we do? Ayato tilted her head.

But Homura and Suzuka looked at each other, and giggled meaningfully.

“On that field, there’s nothing to worry about. —Right, Sister?”

“Of course, Brother. How about the situation of ‘that’?”

“For ‘that’, it went beyond my expectation. I gave it to Kodama<sup>[4]</sup> right after I had drawn the finished blueprint of the water carriage, and they actually finished it in just a day, so I got surprised! Furthermore, it’s end result is perfect!”

Homura patted the body of the carriage. Although it was called a water carriage, its figure was like that of a wooden boat that couldn’t accumulate motion force. The carriage cabin was also made to be classical and simple.

Rather than a carriage, it was more of a boat that would glide on water, but since it was pulled by a ‘Hippocamp’, then it belonged to the classification of a carriage perfectly.

“Although, I never expected you to start drawing the blueprint from scratch. Senpai’s Gift is as convenient as ever.”

“Well, on the other hand, that’s as useful as my gift can be.”

Yes—Saigou Homura’s Gift was not a power that could play an important role when it came to critical moments. Instead it was a different kind of Gift, possessor of which could recreate anything that he destroyed or disassembled before.

But according to the holder, although he would be able to thoroughly understand the structure, he wouldn’t be able to perfectly understand what it was made of, however, the situation this time was somewhat different.

Tracing the wooden part of the carriage, Homura happily said:

“The wood of this Water Tree is amazing. If you made a boat with it, the resistance of water’s viscosity almost vanishes, allowing it to glide smoothly on the surface of the water. As for the roots of the sapling, it seems like it could absorb and accumulate quite an amount of water, considering the standards of living within this ‘Little Garden’, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that it was one of the necessary things.”

Homura looked towards the Water Tree as he spoke of it with deep emotions.

However, Ayato was stunned from his words.

“Wa-wait a minute. Senpai. Where did you got all these knowledge from...?”

“Oh, you were talking about this. It seems that the woods and minerals in Little Garden itself have a variety of powers, so even if I don’t disassemble them, I will be able to somewhat understand its nature just by a glance. Then, using what I already know, I made the blueprint and gave it to the kodamas to make it. Something like that.”

There’s rarely any opportunity to draw a blueprint for a galleon like this, so I really wanted to give it a try, said Homura in good mood. She heard that he was interested in vehicles the day before, however it would be more accurate to say that he liked building them.

Yet, Ayato got more stunned after she heard what he had said.

When it comes to drawing information from just a glance, it wasn’t such a simple matter. Depending on the Gift’s growth, it boasts with the absurd rarity

when it came to Game makeups.

Homura tapped the carriage once again, and turned his sight towards Suzuka and Ayato.

“However, this is as much as I can support. I will leave the rest to you two. Especially Suzuka, there’s no need for limitation this time. Feel free to use it in front of others.”

“No problem! I will never know when I will have such an opportunity again, so I really wanted to use it to the full potential.”

“Very well. I also wanted to see how far Suzuka can go.”

Sounds of laughter could be heard from the two of them.

Yet on the other hand, Ayato pouted as she held the reins tight.

“I understand. I will serve as the rider so the two of you may focus on thinking of some schemes. Well, if push comes to shove, I will do something with my horsemanship skills alone.”

“Alright, alright. I know Aya-chan’s horsemanship is really high. So the main character this time would be Aya-chan, and we two will be the workers behind the scene!”

Suzuka also stepped onto the water carriage. As the whistle of the Spirit Train’s departure sounded, Shirayuki-hime slowly rose her sickle-shaped neck from the water, overlooking them.

**『Fumu, looks like everybody is ready. —Then, let us confirm the rules again. First of all, the game will start right after the Spirit Train’s departure. Then, we would do a one anti-clockwise lap around this great tree of “Underwood”, and whoever arrives at this place first would be the winner. The first one that returns to this position will be granted the position for the winner. Although the lands behind the Aquatic City are still undeveloped, there are still narrow waterways connected to one another. You may choose your favourite route to the finish line.』**

“Okay.”

“I understand.”

“But I would have to ask. In this race, any behaviours of intentional collision and direct impediment towards opponent are forbidden right?”

“Rest assured, I am not the kind who would resort to such vulgar means. If I won by such mean, wouldn’t I receive criticism from the audience? Abiding to the rules while competing in Games is what makes them sacred —That said, it is legal to exercise your Gifts.”

“OK. I’m relieved to hear that.”

Both parties assumed their positions. It’s a water city after all, even if it was a short distance, a boat would be needed for it. Hence, it wouldn’t be odd if there are several boats that would be crossing on the road. Luckily, with the help from the landlords, a large amount of it was reduced for the sake of this race. It seems that the money made through the selling of tickets would be rather high, should we fetch some fee? Homura and Suzuka thought about these.

The vibration caused by the departure of ‘Spirit Train’, caused the water surface to sway.

Ayato picked up the whip and started preparing as she focused all her senses onto her hearing.

At the same time the ‘Spirit Train’ came out of the great tree while raising a whistle after unloading the cargo, Kuro Usagi stood in front of the gong used for the game, and raised her hand to declare the start of the game.

“WATER RIDER OF THE HIPPOCAMP’ —STARTS NOW!”

Dong~~~~!!! The gong projected a loud sound, and the whistle of the train sounded at the same time the game started. Ayato was slightly quicker than Shirayuki-hime and got her hippocamp running first.

Since it was a water carriage, there were no wheels attached to it, but instead, it was gliding on the water instead. Ayato who originally thought that there would be pressure after setting off, smiled as she recalled that the hull of the boat was made from the trunk of the water tree.

*(Looks like the gliding was smoother as I thought. Like this, it would be fine*

*even if I went overboard up a bit.)*

Ayato clenched the reins. As if responding to the spirit of the rider, the Hippocamp also raised a neigh as it rushed forward in full speed. Although it was only by a bit, but it was clear that she was in the lead.

On the other hand, Homura and Suzuka spread out the rough sketch of the city, planning the routes they were going to be in.

“What do you think, Brother? In general, wouldn’t it be better to travel inside as much as possible?”

“No, you are too simple-minded, Sister. While the waterway is indeed spread out like a spider web, we wouldn’t be able to use any way where the boat’s hull cannot pass, and protecting ourselves would be difficult were something to happen.”

“I see. Then, we shall have the highroad as our main focus.”

He drew the route on the map with a brush. Although they have told the plan to Ayato before hand, they have not actually surveyed the entire city.

They started the water town race without any prior knowledge of its terrain. As a result, they had to grasp the characteristics of the city and find the shortest route as soon as possible.

“At the beginning, try to keep a distance between you and Shirayuki-san, it doesn’t have to be far, but don’t be too close either. Then, after we have decided the route, sprint as fast as you can. The rest would be how the other will hinder us...”

“Hehe. I have already seen through your plan, foolish children! Don’t think that this would be so easy!”

Shirayuki-hime roared while she was underneath the water, causing the waterway to tremble violently, forming waves. Looks like the hindering had already begun.

Within the trembling carriage, despite hitting their heads, Homura and Suzuka confirmed the time.

“It has been 3 minutes since the start of the game! There will be an

intermittent attack later on!"

"Understood! I will return the attack later, so be prepared for it, Aya-chan!"

Suzuka warned Ayato as she was in the carriage. However, Ayato didn't have the time to fuss over it.

As the horseman of the carriage, she had to prevent the boat from overturning, pay attention to the water flow, and also to prevent herself from falling, causing her to strain her nerves.

The timing to pull the reins. The balance between the two stirrup when she was stepping on them.

Water horsemanship was a skill that could not be cultivated through ordinary experiences. Yet, Ayato was driving it perfectly.

*(.....This is really surprising. If it's just making the Hippocamp run, even an amateur could do that, but to be riding it this perfectly!)*

It would be impossible to be this good just from learning basic horsemanship. It seemed that she was no ordinary person. Shirayuki-hime swung her body beneath the water, as if she was trying to say "It's more interesting this way."

In a flash, a giant wave approached.

"Fuuh~~!"

Ayato's breathing began to synchronize with the Hippocamp. In order for the Hippocamp to enter the waves easily, she moved her center of gravity to the right. However, from this, there's a risk of the boat overturning.

She released her grip on one of the hands that was holding onto the reins and used it to support the equipment that was connecting the Hippocamp with the carriage, and called out to the two of them inside.

"The waves are approaching from the right! In order to move smoothly, please try to support the boat!"

"Understood!"

Right after that, Suzuka bend her body from the boat and grabbed the top part of the door. Ayato could feel a cold sweat rising as she thought what

Suzuka was doing, but what could be seen on Suzuka's face was only an expression of seriousness.

As the wave approached, Suzuka bowed her body substantially, balancing the overturning boat.

Ayato's eyes widened as she was shocked from Suzuka's stunts, but she realized immediately, the reason behind this stunt that this girl made.

"So that's it...! Using the essentials of surfing...! I Didn't know that Suzuka had such skills,"

"Nah, this is actually my first try, I can do it if I try!"

"..... Except that the water intake of the carriage is severe."

Homura who was drenched by the waves stuck out his head from the other side of the boat. Ayato, while showing a wry smile, asked for next instructions.

"What should we do next, Senpai?! If there is no other countermeasures, I think it would be more appropriate to take the highroad!"

"No, turn right next at the next fork in the road, then move towards the industrial area! Let's settle it there once and for all!"

Understood! Right after the instructions were given, Ayato turned the water carriage towards right, in the direction of the industrial area. A remarkably large waterway appeared on their way. It appeared that it was a shopping district. There were not only street stalls, but high-flying banners could also be seen on top of the clean and luxurious buildings. With a glance, one could see that the banners here and there were the same. Presumably, these must all belong to the same community.

While Homura looked at the state of the shopping district, he counted the flags that were repeating the most.

*(Looks like the most are the ones with six scars imprinted on them... 'Six Scars'. If I remember correctly, the 'Spirit Train' also had the similar mark.)*

It was probably the banner of the landlords community. The second most was the 'Draco Greif', 'Underwood', and a red banner with a girl as its emblem.

The fact that these flags were deeply respected was clearly understood.

Despite the fact that they were hung outside, there wasn't even a trace of stain that could be seen on them, it's obvious that they washed it everyday. In addition, there were no other flags that were hung as high as or higher than the 4 flags mentioned, which is also one of their characteristics.

*(Although it may be due to fear, but from the street's lively and cheerful atmosphere, it doesn't seem to be the case. So, it's more because of respect?)*

Moving away willingly just by greeting them, and being able to convene such an audience. It seems that there's an absurdly high amount of support for this competition. The leader who governed this place must have been highly respected.

*(Could it be that Iza-nii...No, that's impossible.)*

Homura gave a wry smile as he shook his head. Although he definitely had talent, he definitely was not the type that would bear the lives of others. Izayoi's good intention would never target an organization, but instead, a strong-minded individuals.

The fact that he would want to live in 'Little Garden'.....Presumably, there are many people living here whom he values.

*(Well, he probably doesn't have time to introduce them to us)*

If he gathered pleasant comrades like that Loli Kuro Usagi and Shirayuki-hime, it's assured that one could make an enjoyable organisation.

Shirayuki-hime who was their opponent, seemed to be enjoying this Game very much.

"Alright, I am going to increase the difficulty! How's this!"

As Shirayuki-hime roared loudly, waterspouts started to rise one after another.

Although it was not enough to cover the entire waterway, tripping up now would definitely be dangerous.

Ayato had no choice but to lower their speed. Not letting go of any chances, Shirayuki-hime sped up and closed the distances.

"Like I'd let you! Suzuka, do it!"

“Got it!”

It has finally come, huh? Shirayuki-hime had also put up a stance. She had never thought of the Gifts they would have, but since they were summoned into ‘Little Garden’, they must be some special Gifts.

Just when she intended to take advantage by extending the distance between them——Shirayuki-hime’s vision suddenly dyed pink.

『Geh!!?』

With her vision blurred, Shirayuki-hime couldn’t help but to lift her head up. She did not know what had happened, and swung her head in pain. However, the serpent couldn’t advance during the period that her head was out of the water.

Homura and the others then took this opportunity to overtake the water serpent.

“Nice! The paint hit her! Aya-chan, take this chance and yank her off!”

“O-Okay! But Suzuka, the Gift just now, after all it’s...”

“Ah, although it looks like teleportation, it’s actually a bit different. It’s Apport & Asport, which is rather inconvenient in comparison to teleportation.”

Homura explained as he stuck out his head out of the carriage.

—In the past, the orphanage “Canaria Family Home” gathered a variety of children that had some ‘slightly’ special abilities. Or rather, it might be better to say if you were gathering children with no place to return to, those kinds of children would naturally gather. Basically, most of their powers weren’t so big as to call them super powers, and were just slightly special, but among them, there were two prominent exceptions.

And they were, Ayazato Suzuka and Sakamaki Izayoi.

Apport

Asport

“Apport and Asport...So they are the “Gift of Bringing” and “Gift of Sending”, is that correct? But nevertheless, being able to control both at once, it’s really incredible...”

“Not really, it’s actually very inconvenient you know? There are many

restrictions, for example, only the right hand can be used to extend the line of things to be transferred to the extension line on the left hand and so on. In addition, I can transfer myself as much as I want, but I cannot use it simultaneously."

After hearing Suzuka talk about the restrictions, Ayato's mind started digesting the information at high speed.

Basically, Suzuka's Apport & Asport ability appeared to work like the moving of a train. The object uses the 'tracks' of her right hand to pass through the intermediary train station, in this case, Suzuka, and then arrives at the destination, in this case, her left hand.



There might be some inconveniences, but it was still a very strong Gift. Within the Little Garden, powers related to teleportation could only be used by Divine Spirits and Demons that governed the boundaries.

Hot and Cold Life and Death Planets and Stars

Maxwell, Ignis-Fatuus, and Halloween. A Gift that only those who managed realms could have, she possessed it in her human body.

*(Although the degree of freedom cannot be compared to the normal teleportation, these methods can be used to different lengths. Senpai aside, why does Suzuka posses such level of Gift...?)*

“Aya-chan, look out!”

Ayato raised her head all at once. While she was thinking, the next waterspouts had already appeared. Even though the collision was close, she still manipulated the reins, but still, it was way too close.

Ayato could not help but emerge in cold sweat, but Suzuka raised her hand causing the waterspout to disappear right before their eyes.

Yet, on the contrary, Shirayuki-hime was the one who got hit by the waterspout.

“Geh-bwaah”

Getting hit by her own waterspout at the edge of her head, she was blown away at once. Watching Shirayuki-hime who was rolling into the city, shouts of enjoyment could be heard from the audiences.

“It’s...It’s.c..c...coming here!!!”

The audience screamed as they fled.

They scattered in every direction would be more appropriate to say. Veins could be seen popping on Shirayuki-hime’s forehead as she bent her head and moaned with anger.

But she was calm on the inside.

*(Grrr...Out of all Gifts one could have, she has Apport & Asport...However, the fact that they are kind enough to explain how her Gift works just when I was beside them, they are truly immature.)*

If what Ayazato Suzuka said was true, then there was a fatal weakness in her Apport & Asport ability. Shirayuki-Hime wasn't foolish enough as to overlook it.

After getting rid of the paint, Shirayuki-hime got back into the waterway and this time, dived even deeper.

*(There's no other choice, I will have to use the underground waterway even if it's a longer path.)*

Shirayuki-hime dove into the underground waterway within the sunken area. Then, she slipped her body inside. With this, Suzuka's Gift would be useless.

Due to the nature of her Gift, if the straight line while holding the right hand can not be visualized, the accuracy should be dramatically reduced.

And that conjecture turnout to be correct. Shirayuki-hime had become able to interfere with her opponents while not showing them her body at all, and she began an unilateral attack on the three contestants.

However, the three of them weren't so delicate as to give up from just that.

Despite the huge whirlpool which had appeared in front of their way, Suzuka climbed up on the carriage and confirmed the situation.

"Aya-chan, I'll send you over to the other side, get ready!"

"I...I am ready!"

After finishing her sentence, Suzuka crossed the obstructing whirlpool and appeared on the other end.

With her right hand aiming at the water carriage, and her left hand aiming at the waterway under her, she pulled the carriage that was from the other side of the whirlpool. The water carriage dropped as it was accompanied by water droplets.

Ayato started sweating cold sweat as she discovered another weakness of Apport & Asport.

*(I..I see! Since Suzuka is acting as the station and it's route, it's natural that she can't move herself while she is transferring the objects. Because there's this restriction, she had to either transfer herself first, or transfer the carriage.)*

In comparison to teleportation which allows the operator to move at the same time, Apport & Asport required more steps. It would be fine for this race game, but it would become a huge hindrance during an emergency.

Ayato strengthened her grip on the reins as she tried to store the information in her head.

“Well...it is also part of my mission to avoid falling into such situation.”

“What?”

“No, nothing. —Senpai. If this continues we will be beaten one-sidedly, any ideas?”

Ayato asked while she was driving the carriage, Homura answered immediately without thinking.

“Although the map of the underground waterway was not drawn, there’s probably no shortcuts. If she’s unlucky, the distance might even grow longer. She would definitely show herself somewhere. Until then, continue running like this.”

“Understood.—By the way...”

Ayato who was sitting on the Hippocamp turned her head alone and looked at Homura who was in the carriage.

“I have already understood it clearly just how powerful Suzuka’s Gift is, then is it possible that Senpai’s gift has a certain power that I have not known.....or perhaps that is not the case, huh?”

“Sadly, no. You should have known how weak my Gift is, right?”

“Ni-haha. If only this was an ocean, his Gift could be utilized to its full potential.”

Ayato and Suzuka showed a mischievous grin as they teased Homura.

Homura scratched his head awkwardly, but immediately recovered as he picked up the map to see their current location.

“We are almost at the industrial area. It’s going to become complicated from now on, are you ready?”

“Yes, I have already memorised the estimated route beforehand, if anything happens, please instruct me.”

“The industrial area, huh? Since it’s a game, maybe we could borrow something that might be useful?”

Just after speaking, they brought up the topic of who is going to pay for the paint that they have used. Since there aren’t any catcalls...That would probably mean that someone else would fix the damage done throughout the game... They hoped so.

“Yeah, if it’s just borrowing, there shouldn’t be a problem”

“You’ve got it. Oh...there it is!”

Suzuka pointed towards the industrial area.

Just as the game entered the state of mid-war...The dark clouds that had surrounded ‘Underwood’, became thicker, and thicker...

\*

“Ooh...Homura-san and the others are using a rather safe game strategy.”

Kuro-Usagi who was the referee jumped between roofs of the city, entering the industrial area to watch the progress of the game. The game so far was about fifty-fifty.

Matching against a divinity holder like Shirayuki-hime, it was natural for one to be surprised.

“Well, It would be really amazing if they were all at the same level as Izayoi-san and Yo-san. But on the other hand, putting up this much fight just by using Apport & Asport is already quite surprising indeed.”

If Ayazato Suzuka’s Gift was entirely based on teleportation alone, the entire match would be one sided. They wouldn’t even need a minute.

The Gift of 'Apport' and 'Asport', in order to carry out long distance transportation, the two steps must always be carried out. Both Suzuka and the carriage would have big openings which would expose them to danger.

Well, at least it would be proper game balance for the audience.

*(They will be reaching the industrial area soon... There are various man-made Gifts created there, and many high-priced articles are scattered around. I wonder what we should do if they get rolled up in this, But it should be all right the way this is going.)*

Kuro Usagi flung her Usagi-Mimi happily.

Entering the industrial area that deals with iron manufacturing, sounds of iron forging could be heard everywhere. It's been rumoured that the water in "Underwood" was suitable for enchanting Gifts into "Adamantine".

Within the great tree, dwell many variety of spirits, allowing them to make great use of their power. As a result, this industrial area was formed.

Kuro Usagi hopped down from the roof onto the riverside of the industrial area.

Sure enough, unlike the shopping street, the production line here doesn't stop. At most, a Casino was opened by the shore for those who didn't have any job on their hand.

There was no one to hinder them, and the atmosphere there also seemed to have no problems

*(But the weather seems to be a little unstable... Maybe it will get stormy?)*

"Hey Porol! Isn't that big sis Kuro Usagi? It's rare to see her at such a dirty place."

"There's no need to say it was dirty, Sharol-nee. In addition, I am the boss here, please use some honorifics."

Hearing familiar voices, Kuro Usagi jumped in shock.

As she followed the direction of the voices, she saw two cat beastmen with nekomimi on their heads.

“Sharol-sama! And also Parol-sama!”

“Long time no see! Big sis Kuro Usagi. How’s the game going?”

“YES! Other than the river which got tainted by the paint, there are no other damages!”

“Nyahaha, then I am relieved! After all, every time we lent our stage to you, it would always end up being wrecked!”

“Sharol-nee, please mind your manners as you speak.”

The young catboy, persuading his older sister, Porol Gundark.

The catgirl, wearing a blacksmith uniform while carrying a giant hammer on her shoulder, Sharol Gundark.

These two who had the flag of ‘Six Scars’ imprinted on their chest, were responsible for the industrial area. They probably came down to check the damages done from Shirayuki-hime’s Gift Game.

Porol stepped forward as he waited for Homura and the others.

“As we, ‘Six Scars’ owe ‘No name’.....Master Izayoi and big sis Kuro Usagi’s community, a favor. That’s why, we would accept almost any request you would ask. However, if this industrial area was to be destroyed, we won’t be able to do business anymore. If that happens, as expected, we won’t be able to cover for you.”

“O-Of course, I understand! We would never add any trouble to ‘Six Scars’ which are our sworn friends.”

“.....Nyahaha. Speaking of it, I have been had so hard back then.”

Sharol suddenly showed a distant look in her eyes.

While Kuro Usagi raised her usamimi in a panic.

—‘Six Scars’ was a trading-specialised community which constructed the ‘Spirit Train’ and also used it for transporting goods. And Sharol Gundark, was one of the very few talents in it who specialised in combat. As part of the alliance, they had many opportunities where they would combine forces with ‘Six Scars’ in a Gift Game, so there were many occasions where Kuro Usagi had

teamed up with Sharol.

Sadly for them, they probably drew the shortest stick while they joined forces.

“Wahhh...We ‘No Names’ have cause you so much trouble that time.”

“There’s no need to worry about it, we still won the Gift Game in the end. But well, a new model of ‘Spirit Train’ is being built here in industrial area...”

“Since I heard that the one of the contestant this time was master Izayoi’s brother, I simply couldn’t just sit still anymore. If the train got destroyed as it got involved in the game, it would turn into a big problem you know?”

“I-I see. However, I personally think that there’s no need for concerns.”

As of now, the style of the game was rather steady. It was instead quite opposite game style from his said brother. No matter how wrong it went, there couldn’t possibly be anything like industrial area getting blown away, Shirayuki-hime getting flung around, or the destruction of land in order to create a shortcut.

As the three of them were talking, the waterway started to tremble.

Sharol’s Nekomimi stood sharp and and she pointed to a certain direction.

“Oh, it’s coming! Big sis!”

The sound of something gliding on the surface of water was heard.

Their lines of sight were changed towards the water carriage that was charging from the city. As the carriage charged while it was suffering from Shirayuki-hime’s attacks, Ayato was able to dodge every obstacles in front of her with her exquisite horsemanship.

Seeing the beautiful “Hippocamp” running between the whirlpools, Porol exclaimed in excitement.

“It’s the chief of the group, Hyutos! why was it willing to help?”

“It is not clear why, but as soon as it saw Ayato-san, it charged towards her.”

“.....Hmm.”

“Nyahaha, it’s obvious that Porol got rejected to be ridden on.”

Porol pouted towards Sharol who just cracked a joke with him and looked the other way.

On the other side—After avoiding the big whirlpools and entering the industrial area, Homura and the others were muted from the sight of Beastmen who were creating industrial goods and spirits who were forging ironworks. Especially those lanterns and candles which were carrying the goods, and those fairies of palm size—which were referred to as ‘Spirit Colony’, helping out with the works, made it really cute yet unusual sight at the same time.

“Oh...oh! Look, Brother! Those cute fairies are running about! How cute!”

“Yes, yes. I can see them too.”

While Suzuka was in great spirit, Homura was calm.

This was the difference in interest between both genders. Instead of looking at the fairies, Homura’s attention was drawn to the train parts lying around the industrial areas, and was looking around while folding his arms.

“Hmm...from those wheels, pistons and other parts, the source of power of the ‘Spirit Train’ should be a reciprocating engine. Then, is it being water resistant due to the power of a Gift?”

The structure itself was no different from an old-fashioned train. But contrary to it’s appearance, it felt unnaturally fast, which caused him to think that it was the work of a Gift.

“The weather has worsen. It will be unfavourable for us if the water level increase and it’s force grows.”

Thunder clouds began to gather, lightnings started to shine above the humongous tree. The signs of a storm had already began to show up. It was just a matter of time before it would start to rain. The site would become favourable for Shirayuki-hime.

“If that happens, we have no choice but to obtain our life necessities by our own hands—Speaking of which, does Senpai have any survival experience in case of a storm?”

“What kind of rubbish are you spouting? I completely belong to an indoor faction.”

“That accounts for it. The only choice is to win. Let’s finish this before the weather worsens even more. —Suzuka, is there anything that we can use as a weapon?”

“Uh...There’s something like a large crossbow, but it probably won’t fit in the carriage. The roof would be crushed if we do so.”

“...So is there anything that resembles a sword or a rifle?”

“Of course, but we couldn’t possibly carry such large items. It would become a hindrance just by leaving on the side”

As Suzuka shook her head, Ayato sighed in disappointment as she continued to spur the ‘Hippocamp’.

—It was at that moment, when a huge lightning struck “Underwood”.

After the violent thunder, the three of them stopped the carriage. Gales of wind started to blow, forming a whirlwind that was seemingly surrounding the great tree of “Underwood”.

The three of them turned towards the huge tree at the same time. Then, A figure of a bull’s head entered their field of vision.

“That is...!”

“Oh...oh no!!!”

Ayato raised her voice. However, it was already too late.

The Minotaur cast out an axe enhanced with lightning, and crushed the water carriage that the three of them were on, into countless bits. The waterway was divided into two, the river became flooded, a pit appeared underneath the water, and a whirlpool was formed.

The carriage that the three were on, sunk into the depths of ‘Underwood’.

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**1** The Mother Earth Goddess who ties the Earth and the Heaven. ↵

**2** The Kanji used here was 雄牛 which is different from how it was written previously - 牡牛. While both of them mean ‘Bull’, the former refers to bull in general, while the other is used specifically for bull of constellation. ↵

**3** YashaGa-Ike. Lit. “Demon Pond”. A drama from 1913, composed by Izumi Kyouka. It tells the story of Princess Shirayuki who was sacrificed to the pond in exchange for the rain. ([more info](#)). The drama is based on the actual legend of Dragon God of [Yashaga Pond](#). ↵

**4** Kodama. ↵

## Chapter 7

Sakamaki Izayoi, Mikado Tokuteru and Prithvi Mata - as the three of them left “Don Bruno”...

“So, what are you going to do from now on, Tokuteru. Are you even going to use Buddha’s “Touriten”?”

“No, this time, we don’t need to go that far. Get on both of you.”

Mikado Tokuteru urged them to get on as he turned on the ignition. Confirming that both of them got on board, Tokuteru faced the Kan-Etsu Expressway heading towards Katsushika district of Tokyo. Becoming suspicious, Izayoi asked Tokuteru while picturing the almost forgotten map of Tokyo Metropolis in his mind.

“Kan-Etsu? Oi, where are you going.”

“My domain is small in Japan. I’m going towards the place where I can open the “Astral Gate”.”

Hitting the gas, Mikado Tokuteru went straight towards Katsushika.

Holding his chin in his hand, Izayoi pondered over what he said.

Taishakuten

“For You to be heading towards Katsushika would mean.....You have some business in the Shibamata Taishakuten temple, right?”

“Indeed. Shibamata Taishakuten temple is my and Uesugi’s domain. Our company is also located there. Out of all the Japanese temples, it is the easiest way to connect to Little Garden. It’s only about four hundred years old, however it fulfills the paradigm shift necessary for opening the “Astral Gate”.

Shibamata Taishakuten—One of the temples that worship Taishakuten and Bishamonten, Established in Kan’ei Era 6th Year of early Edo Period. Among the temples that worship Taishakuten, it would be the prominent domain in Japan.

Taking in mind that the place he governed was ancient India, compared to it

this domain was quite too young. There was probably no other suitable place.

If the people coming to visit it knew about this, they would surely be shocked.

No one would have ever imagined that that the main deity worshiped by the shrine would actually take residence so close to it.

Izayoi laughed in an amazed tone.

“That’s probably a god’s grace as well. Did the Shitamachi around Katsushika stay the same in this five years? like Shopping districts or back alleys.”

“There’s no way it would change in mere five years. The unchanging part of that neighborhood is what attracts the customers. But well, it does suit me. The fact that the neighborhood of the temple that borrows my name has become a district like that gives me a nice feeling.”

Mikado Tokuteru’s expression softened just by a bit.

—Speaking of Taishakuten, he was one of the oldest among the divine spirits, however, his legend was full of human emotions put into it. Being known as a drunkard and a womanizer, the king of Gods who gained most popularity among people was not just for show. This lustful fellow who loves his liquor isn’t called the king of the Gods that won over the heart of the masses for nothing.

Izayoi also nodded as if agreeing to him, but then shrugged and shook his head as if he remembered something.

“I do feel like wanting to visit it sometime. But as expected, we don’t have time for being so carefree. I’m going to return immediately after everything settles down.”

“There’s no need to be in such a rush. It could be that after this there will be another period of time when the Little Garden’s time will be in sync with the outside world’s time ,you know? Even if you spend some time with Suzuka and Homura, you can still coordinate it later.

“Don’t say such stupid stuff. I went there after deciding to cast away everything without ever planning to go return to them. And yet, after three..... no, five years have passed, something like me showing up all of a sudden, isn’t it

quite rude towards those who I have abandoned.”

His expression gradually changed from smiling to serious. Prith and Tokuteru understood the reason behind his faithfulness.

Canaria who was the manager of the orphanage.

Izayoi who was the oldest from the orphanage.

Five years ago when those two had disappeared—Saigou Homura and Ayazato Suzuka were still just ten year old kids. For them who had their dear ones lost one after another, those times were undoubtedly harsh.

Those two as well, who always clung to Izayoi’s back without separating, were now fifteen years old. It was the big crossroad of life, and also the first step of a human accepting its first trial.

He couldn’t expect them to act as if nothing had happened after disappearing for selfish reasons at such crucial times of their lives. Although he wanted to finish things without ever meeting them, for various reasons, the situation fell into this kind of emergency.

However, Tokuteru found it hard to agree with him and lightened the cigar held in his mouth while such atmosphere drifted about.

“I see.....No, I do understand what you are trying to say. But, that’s if the situation went smoothly and you didn’t meet them, isn’t that right? After rolling them up in it, that excuse doesn’t work anymore.”

“.....Thats.”

Feeling the reason in Tokuteru’s words, Izayoi turned silent for a bit.

At that point, Prith who kept quiet until now asked in wonder.

“Izayoi. If you care for those children so much, then why did you cast aside the “Canaria Family Home”?”

“Well, that’s because, there were people aside from me who they could be entrusted to. Don Bruno and Madam were very caring, and there was also the old man Ushimatsu. When the daddy-long-legs were all present, my absence alone shouldn’t have been a problem.”

Izayoi spoke nostalgically.

Old man Ushimatsu who he mentioned, was the president of the Japan's leading enterprise - Ushimatsu Corporation, and also the patron who invested a large sum into the establishment of the orphanage—or so it was publically. But in truth, he was one of the Izayoi and Canaria's gambling friends.

The reason they used gambling as the means of approach to Mr. Ushimatsu who had built a fortune in his life, established a company, and was known as a celebrity around his place, wasn't only because they wanted to get a large investment.

Izayoi's and Canaria's true intention was to involve Mr. Ushimatsu, who had viewed them as great people, into the founding of the orphanage which they wanted to build.

The result was two wins, one loss, and two draws. This mysterious person who was even called "Strongest swindler of Heisei" by Izayoi, was very pleased with the two, and readily gave consent with investing into "Canaria Family Home".

"There was that monstrous old man. He would take care of those simple problems. Homura and Suzuka in particular.....were the most favoured kids of old man Ushimatsu. But still, I didn't consider that they would be made to enroll in Houei Private's association. It's a prestigious school, but the expenses are supposedly high."

Yayaya - Izayoi laughed as if he was having fun. The reason why there were so many elders like Don Bruno or old man Ushimatsu among his acquaintances, was probably because of his special origins and the Gift that he carried.

Being a hedonist by nature, he was not holding back to have his way with the things he was unable to stomach. His behavior looked childish at a glance, but he was resolved to take responsibility for all his actions and dealt with everything. Therefore, there was simply no need to remove his self-possessed attitude from the everyday life.

But there weren't many people from his generation who could understand Izayoi's such views of life. Because ordinary boys didn't have the ability to take responsibility or resolution in them, no matter how much they pushed

themselves.

Therefore, most people who acknowledged Izayoi as “Good”, were naturally elders. And Izayoi as well enjoyed the company of adults who, from years of experience have acquired complete view of life.

Among them, old man Ushimatsu was certainly one of the specials.

Mikado and Prith who understood that fact had mutually casted their eyes down with complex expressions. The two of them who were silent for a while, began to talk carefully, looking as if they were trying to find the right words.

“.....That old man, has passed away.”

“Huh?”

“Izayoi. Calm down and listen. ....It’s something that happened on the Golden Week two years ago. Apparently, Mr. Ushimatsu was going on a trip with his family, however he had a heart failure on the way.”

Izayoi swallowed his breath with wide eyes from the notice about his death.

“.....That old man, died you say?”

“Yes. After that, the Ushimatsu Corporation stopped financing the “Canaria Family Home”. And around that time, all patrons of the orphanage pulled back all at once. To the point that there was not a single patron for some time.”

“The two things which saved the “Canaria Family Home” that was on the brink of breaking up, was the research that Homura’s father left behind, and Everything Company, or so I heard.”

This time, Izayoi showed astonishment as he listened to Prith’s words.

—Two years ago when patrons retreated one after another.

Mr. Ushimatsu was the only person who continued providing the funds to the “Canaria Family Home”. However, if it was like a normal year, it was expected that he would take the youths along and invite them for a short domestic travel.

Before that however, came the unexpected news about Mr. Ushimatsu’s

death.

Although Homura and Suzuka were at a loss about it all, they didn't quit there and requested for them to somehow keep financing them. However, they were turned away by Mr. Ushimatsu's second son.

As there was no sight of other patrons and the two resolved for the breakup, the one who came with the offer to them, was Kudou Ayato, the only daughter of the president of Everything Company.

"Everything Company.....And also, Kudou you say?"

"Yes. Yeah, haven't you heard? Everything Company is one of the world's five giant trading companies that took root after the Second World War. The story goes that a Japanese girl who crossed over from the other side is connected to their rise.

"..... No, this is my first time hearing that. So for what reason did the Everything Company start to invest?"

"For continuing the research about the Nanomachines left by Homura's father.....or rather, their reproduction. You should also be aware of the nature of Homura's Gift, right?"

To Tokuteru's words, Izayoi gave a nod as if having understood it.

"I see.....! Homura has the Gift of "Recreating what he disassembled"! So they are using that in some way, you mean!?"

"Yeah. In the first place, it became a bit stronger Gift from the one you remember. It's something like that."

Tokuteru informed while blowing the smoke. For a fifteen-years-old youngster like Homura to participate in the research of the latest Nanomachines, it was the utilization of his Gift to its full potential.

"I acted as the middleman with Everything Company. Then, with the conditions to dedicate most of his life to the research of Nanomachines, he has saved the "Canaria Family Home". —How is it? It's quite a tough decision for a kid to make, don't you think?"

".....Tokuteru. Did you just silently watch as he made that decision?"

“Of course. How could an outsider like me interject when Homura himself made up his mind and decided on it?”

While speaking about it as if it was something obvious, he turned the wheel to the right.

As he entered the capital from Kan-Etsu with high speed, Tokuteru lit up the second cigarette.

“.....That said, it was a decision of recklessly living kids who knew nothing of the world. When they fall down, it’s the adult’s job to pull their asses up. But you only have to do that if something happens dynamically and they cannot stand up by themselves. If that time came, I.....or you, would just take responsibility.”

“\_\_\_\_\_”

Without denying or affirming it, Izayoi shifted his line of sight to the outside of the car.

It wasn’t as if he was overly optimistic about it, but it seemed that the situation around “Canaria Family Home” has changed quite a lot.

Regarding the matter of Homura, Izayoi also thought that what Tokuteru said was correct. If you force kids to make a decision, then to help them when they fail is the duty of the guardian. Even for the kids of the “No Names” community of Little Garden where Izayoi belonged to, he planned to do just the same when the time came for them to make a decision.

But that was only possible because they were within the range where Izayoi could keep an eye on them. The current Izayoi had many friends in Little Garden, he absolutely couldn’t return back.

In other words, lending them a hand whenever he came to outside world just like now, was the only thing he could do.

Seeing that it was such a situation, he wasn’t able to agree so simply.

To say nothing of the fact that throwing everything at Tokuteru without hesitation was also out of question. If it came down to throwing it to Tokuteru, it would be better to go and bow down to Don Bruno with all his strength.

“Well, no one thinks that you’re obligated to do it. Mr. Ushimatsu’s death was unexpected and, because of that, it was Homura that decided to take responsibility for the orphans. That’s why, next time you talk with Homura, just be sure to keep that in mind. —Now then, we’ll arrive at Shibamata Taishakuten in a bit.”

They dropped the speed at the capital. After the three came to Shitamachi, they parked the car, and stepped foot in his domain—The grounds of Shibamata Taishakuten.

\*

—“Underwood” Industrial Area - The Second Ironworks.

The moment when the blow similar to lighting aimed at the three of them...

Saigou Homura and Kudou Ayato were transferred to the grounds of industrial area.

“Wah!”

“Kya!”

It was a sound raised after falling with a thud. As if following that, the waterway was smashed up together with a thunderous roar. The waterway hit by the giant battleaxe and lightning, formed a giant crater at the bottom and produced a giant whirlpool.

Had they been late even by a moment, their lives would’ve been in danger. Without a doubt, the three of them would either scatter their organs everywhere or be hit by a lightning and get burned to death.

“Tsk, where’s Suzuka.....?”

Homura and Ayato raised their heads in shock. Suzuka was also next to them, but her state was unusual. As Ayato approached her in panic, there was a big laceration visible on her abdomen.

Then, at that point, she recalled. About that fact that her Gift being different from normal teleportation, transferring herself and transferring the target had to be done separately.

While their faces were still pale, they looked at the waterway moving in whirls.

“N.....No way.....!!!”

—It was such a close call that if they were late even by an instant, their lives would've ended.

Should she transfer herself, or transfer Homura and Ayato.

In a situation where she had to choose one side.....Suzuka chose to save the two of them.

“T-The wound is deeper than mine from back then.....! A-At this rate,”

“This requires immediate medical attention! We will do an emergency treatment in “Underwood”! Suzuka, can you use it just two more times!?”

“Ku.....!!! But then, Aya-chan will.....!”

“Don’t worry about me! Even if it’s just the two of you, please leave first!!!”

While coughing blood, Suzuka disappeared, followed by Homura.

When Ayato was the only one left back at that place, the Minotaur was already charging from behind.

Minotaur rushed forth like a heavy tank.

However, the residents of “Underwood” weren’t so weak as to let it keep on doing as he pleased to the victim.

“Everyone, get in position!!!”

Hearing that command, the Minotaur halted its feet and looked behind.

On the opposite shore of the waterway, Sharol and Porol of “Six Scars” have gathered their comrades that were in industrial area, and instructed them to prepare the fixed type large ballista.

Holding a baton with a Gryphon mane attached on its tip, Porol swung it

down without hesitation.

“That’s the infamous Celestial Beast! No need to hold back! Large Ballista “Failnaught Ballista”—Launch everything at it!”

The Gryphon baton produced a whirlwind.

Along with the wind, the projectiles of fixed type large ballista were also released. The arrowheads released from the giant ballista that was bigger than the the human body, rained down on Minotaur while forming a curve with the tracking Gift.

The fifty two arrowheads bigger than the upper arm, fell down all at once with a supersonic speed.

For the Minotaur who had parted with its battleaxe and had its power lowered, to withstanding all of this was impossible. Despite knocking down half of them by using both of its hands, the remaining twenty six arrowheads pierced through Minotaur’s whole body.

Piercing its right arm, skewering its both feet, twelve arrowheads proceeding to pierce through its chest muscles.

『GEEYAAAAaaa—!!!』

It released a scream of agony, big enough that it made the tremors in atmosphere visible.

This overwhelming and one-sided sight was plenty enough to make one wonder whether there was a need to go this far against one beast.

However, Porol’s gaze did not falter even for a bit.

As someone who was born in Little Garden, he understood all too well that something like a Celestial Beast wasn’t an opponent that would die just from this much.

“.....Everyone, load the next round and stay sharp. If you see even the slightest movement, open fire immediately.”

On Porol’s command, the Beastmen of “Six Scars” immediately took action.

During that time, Kuro Usagi rushed beside Ayato and supported her

shoulder.

“I’m sorry Ayato-san! For such thing to happen while Kuro Usagi was with you,”

“.....No, It couldn’t be helped. You are the “Aristocrat of Little Garden”, and also the holder of “Judge master”. Just because you weren’t able to participate in battle, you have nothing to be ashamed of. If there’s someone who should feel ashamed here——”

Declaring it strongly, Ayato stood up alone. However, the situation was unusual.

Being a bit overpowered by her, Kuro Usagi took a step back.

“.....Ayato-san?”

Raising her Usamimi, she looked at her back.

That back of hers did not bore any resemblance to the one from some time ago.

Kuro Usagi evaluated Ayato as a girl who was both courteous and docile, and carried a somewhat dignified glamour. From the fighting spirit released by her, Kuro Usagi could only hold her breath without realizing.

Her golden hair rustled as if responding to that fighting spirit, stood straight as if a sword was running through it, and was filled robust strength.

Even if a normal person saw that standing figure, they would feel a spirit similar to the fierce gods.

“Pathetic.....!!! In the fourteen years after descending to the outer world.....For my skills to drop to this this level already.....No, just growing dull would’ve been better!!! But to be unable protect the school I was supposed protect, and to fall behind that level of opponent.....!!!”

From such hostility, Kuro Usagi reflexively put herself on guard. The situation was clearly strange.

And then, the moment she picked up the two spears that were dropped on the floor of Ironworks in the industrial area, her nature changed to the core.

Dual sword wielding wasn't all that uncommon, but there were few who used dual spears. Since there were no martial schools that taught it, that stance of hers was most likely self-taught.

Kuro Usagi had memories of the double spear stance that Ayato took.

*(So she really is.....the Queen's Knight's.....!!!)*

Three years ago—Kuro Usagi and others fought alongside a certain female knight, and witnessed her death.

She heard that after her death, she was sent to the outer world as the subordinate of the Golden Queen “Queen Halloween” and had her memories wiped.



Kudou Ayato—Her name was clearly similar, so she had a guess to her true identity. However, since her outer appearance didn't match the one from Kuro Usagi's memories, she thought she was a different person. But there's no place for doubt now.

Ayato, brimming with strong fighting spirit, looked exactly the same as the Queen's Knight from Kuro Usagi's memories.

And then, responding to her fighting spirit, the Minotaur woke up.

No matter how low its intelligence was, it wasn't so dumb as to not notice this fighting spirit. While removing the arrowheads stuck all over its body, it raised a fierce roar.

『GEEEYAAAAaaa—!!!』

Turning its back to the unit of "Six Scars", the Minotaur broke into a run.

Ayato prepared to meet the enemy.

But at that moment—the thunderclouds that caused thunders to roar far above the skies, formed a giant whirlpool even visible to the eye, and started to release a rainy wind which even scattered the leaves and branches of the great tree.

Kuro Usagi got surprised from such strange typhoon outbreak and looked up at the sky.

"This.....is bad! Porol-sama, please advice the Aquatic City to take refuge immediately!!!"

"Already on it! I also started setting up the breakwater in order to avoid the flood,"

"Doing that is pointless! Please convey to the group that's constructing the breakwater to get away from the riverside at once! If they don't act immediately.....They won't make it.....!"

Porol was overwhelmed from Kuro Usagi's pressure.

Ayato and Minotaur who seemed like they were about to clash also glared at the thundercloud which started squirming as if it was alive. Minotaur stopped charging at Ayato, jumped away from her and disappeared into the outskirts.

“Kh.....“The Bull of Heaven”.....It’s coming.....!!!”

In the sky far above, the roar of the bull monster reverberated.

That roar, which was reverberating throughout the entire “Underwood” made everyone who heard it tremble in fear. The thundercloud grew the horns of lightning, and started to turn into a giant fighter bull.

The moment that giant bull moved, the Aquatic City was assaulted by twenty four strikes of lightning.

Four of them rained down at Ayato and Kuro Usagi as if they decided to aim at them, and smashed the building apart.

Repelling the flying debris with spears, Ayato glared at the wriggling bull monster in the sky.

“My fighting isn’t suitable with “The Bull of Heaven”.....Kuro Usagi-san! Is there any powerful person nearby!?”

“W-Well, everyone went to the other region where the Second Sun Authority War is being held in order to observe it.....“Draco Greif”, “Great Sage Who Devastate Seas” as well as “No Names” all have their main force sent on a business.....!!!”

Kuro Usagi shouted while pinning down the Usamimi which were being shaken by the rainy wind.

Ayato who realized that it would be bad at this rate, pointed at the great tree and suggested taking a refugee.

“There’s no choice.....Let’s escape inside the great tree! If it’s under the protection of the Queen, then within it would be absolutely safe! I will leave the evacuation process to Porol-san and Shirayuki-hime-sama,”

“No, Ayato-san please escape by yourself! Kuro Usagi will help with evacuation! Right now, you have to be beside Suzuka!”

Being struck by Kuro Usagi’s words, Ayato widened her eyes. Letting go of the spears, her expression reverted back to the one from when they met, and she bowed apologetically.

“.....Understood. I will leave this place to you. Be careful!”

Turning her back at Kuro Usagi, Ayato escaped towards the great tree of “Underwood”.

Even during that time, the rainy winds increased their strength and continued to threaten the surroundings of the great tree with lighting strikes.

However, the thunderstorm wasn’t the only thing that was a threat. Rather, the true danger was the rising and rapid water current traveling along the waterway of the Aquatic City.

Within the roars of thunder, the screams raised from the aquatic city were in no way inferior to it.

People were drowning in the flooded river.

People were hit and burned by the lightning.

People were crushed by the collapsed buildings.

Kuro Usagi glared at the sky while biting on her lips, however the current Kuro Usagi wasn’t able to fight with that bull monster. She who was the holder of “Judge Master” couldn’t challenge the Sun Authority War. Moreover, what was worse was that all her comrades were away, fighting so that the Sun Authorities wouldn’t fall in hands of the bad people.

Among the war potential who may still rush here, from the people who could participate in the subjugation of Taurus. Within Kuro Usagi’s mind, a name of one comrade appeared.

*(Izayoi-san.....If only Izayoi-san was here.....!!!)*

He of course knew nothing about “Underwood” falling in danger.

If he did, he wouldn’t have allowed something so cruel. If there was some way to convey him of these circumstances, he would definitely come rushing even if he was worlds apart.

Kuro Usagi searched for such ways, but there was nothing else she could do.

Right now, she had no choice but to run away from the Aquatic City that was being trampled down.

# Chapter 8

—Great Tree of “Underwood” - Bathing Area.

The Aquatic City that boasted with beautiful sceneries had underwent a rapid change from the festive mood from earlier and had fallen into a state of utter chaos. The interior of the Great Tree was full of refugees all the way up to the cave that was dug for the underground water veins, and every room was occupied by the wounded. This was just like the forefront of a battlefield.

The whole evacuation process would have needed about three hours to finish, but with the quick guidance and encouragement, it was completed quickly.

Actions taken by Kuro Usagi and Shirayuki-hime who had volunteered to aid with the flooded riverside were splendid in particular. Kuro Usagi who worked hard in the rescue operation for three hours without rest, was sprawled on top of Shirayuki-hime, completely exhausted.

“Yawn.....I’m so exhausted. To think that doing a rescue operation in a storm would be this difficult. I can’t help but feel respect towards the aiding communities in the world.”

**『Yes. If Kuro Usagi-dono wasn’t there, there would’ve been a great deal of people that couldn’t have been saved. Despite your little power, you did well.』**

“Not at all. You too Shirayuki-hime-sama, as expected from the Water God!”

Shirayuki-hime and Kuro usagi exchanged words of praise. In truth, if not for these two, many people would’ve been washed away by the downstream. Had it been only a single river, Shirayuki-hime’s Gift would’ve been enough to save them, however in the Aquatic City where the complicated waterways were spread out like meshes, there was a limit to the extent where her eyes could reach.

Shirayuki-hime who thanked Kuro Usagi for her cooperation, let her down from her head, and then she also transformed into her human form. She, clad in a white kimono, said while pointing at the top of the great tree.

“It seems we got quite wet. Me aside, Kuro Usagi-dono shouldn’t let her body catch a cold. Just above here, there’s a large public bath dedicated to special guests. It would be good to go there along with the children to warm up.”

“I-Is that okay?”

“It is. I will convey the story to “Six Scars”. Kuro Usagi-dono had it bad ever since yesterday, right? Rest your body for a short while.”

“Understood. I will do as you say then!”

Kuro Usagi headed to the upper floor with raised Usamimi.

My my, Shirayuki-hime shook her head slightly while smiling.

“.....Well then. Let’s look around for some more, shall we.”

As Shirayuki-hime reverted back to her serpent form, she entered the waterway in order to explore the downtown once more.

At that time, at another place.

Ayato searched about frantically for the sickroom where Suzuka was brought to, and after finally finding it, rushed inside.

“Suzuka! Are you alright!?”

She came running while being completely drenched, and rushed inside as she was calling out her name.

Thereupon, Homura glanced at her from inside the room, looking displeased.

“.....Ayato. Enter quietly.”

“Ah, s-sorry.”

She strode quickly towards Homura while her cheeks got dyed red from embarrassment. On top of bed, Suzuka lay there sound asleep.

Her complexion looked good as well, and there didn’t seem to be any danger to her life.

Overwhelmed by the relief, Ayato almost sank onto the floor, looking as if her knees gave away.

“T-Thank god.....! I thought that injury was life-threatening.....!!! There was a medical Gift in “Underwood”, right, Senpai?”

“.....Yeah. Her life shouldn’t be in danger.”

Homura, in contrast to Ayato, looked at Suzuka’s sleeping face with a sad expression.

Just at that moment, a voice searching for them was heard in the sickroom.

“Excuse me. Is Saigou Homura inside?”

“? I’m here.”

As Homura peeked his head outside, Porol immediately looked at him with completely serious expression.

“I see. In that case, come with me at once. I wish to hear about the current Game.”

“Got it. Ayato please watch over Suzuka. Her condition is stabilized already, so let her take a bath once she wakes up. It’s also bad for you to stay drenched, right?”

“Y-Yes.”

Ayato noticed that there was some anxiety in Homura’s mood, but she still remained at that place as told.

Homura who was called to a separate room, relayed the whole story about the current matter.

About meeting the Celestial Beast Taurus in the outer world. And as he was explaining up to the part about coming to Little Garden, Porol suspiciously removed his glasses and stared at Homura.

“.....I can’t believe it. I have never heard about Celestial Beasts being able to go between the outer world and Little Garden.”

“Even if you tell me something like that, I don’t know how to respond. That’s not something I would know.”

"Well, that true. —But it was pretty bad huh. If all the "Floor Masters" become unable to be reached, how about staying in "Underwood" for a while?"

"No, that might also turn into something bad. In my world, this typhoon is spreading a virus that's even infecting the plants. It's not certain whether this Great Tree won't get infected either."

Porol knit his brows from Homura's report.

It seems all the means are used up, he shrugged.

".....Well, it happens when it happens. No other choice but to persuade the inhabitants of "Underwood" and rely on another community. What will you guys do?"

"I.....have someone I have to meet by any means."

He looked at Porol with eyes that contained composure and peacefulness. Those eyes appeared to hold both resolution and resignation in them.

When he was about to ask what was on his mind, the door suddenly flew open.

"E-Excuse me! Is P-P-Porol-kun here!?"

The door opened with a loud bang. As the two of them turned their eyes thinking about what was the matter, a new Nekomimi girl, Carol Gundark came flying in.

From her noisy voice, Porol looked greatly perplexed and sighed regretfully.

"Carol.....You also became an adult cat, so calm down a bit. Also, call me a boss, a boss. —So, what's wrong? Did "The Bull of Heaven" start acting up again?"

"N-No, not that! It's something more important! L-L-Look at this!"

After saying so, what she took out was a single envelope.

It was an envelope with an elegant seal pattern that was wrapped up in an extravagantly high quality parchment. It was obvious just by looking at that wrapping that it was written by a person of high class. Even to Homura, who usually didn't send any written letters, the status of its sender was clearly

apparent. It would be all the more obvious for the residents of Little Garden.

But what truly surprised Porol wasn't that.

He who knew of the banner stamped on the wax seal, received that envelope as his lips were twitching.

"T-The golden seal.....! Why did a letter from "Queen Halloween" come with such timing!?? She's not trying to force some unreasonable demands during a crisis like this, right!??"

"H-How should I know! A-Anyway, just read!"

Carol handed over the letter as her hooked tail flicked up.

Porol took out a knife and carefully opened the letter so as to avoid damaging the seal.

By all rights, a seal is something one should cut open, but to open it while avoiding any damage to the banner is probably a form of etiquette showed towards the Queen.

Taking out the letter from inside, Porol timidly read the contents aloud.

"....."I will tell you the situation regarding Taurus. Before the day becomes dyed in red, I wish to invite Saigou Homura to the audience room.""

"Is this true!?"

Homura's face brightened up in an instant. Queen was the person he had to talk by any means after all. But for Porol, it was also the only person he didn't want to contact at any cost.

"Until the sunset.....Hey hey, are you serious! There's not much time left!"

"I-Is that so? Is it that far?"

"No, the audience room is inside the Great Tree. It's the room used for pleasing the Queen. The problem is—"

Porol examined Homura from top to bottom.

From yesterday's battle with the Minotaur and the summon uproar, both his hair and clothes were in a complete mess. His body that had got drenched by this heavy rain hasn't dried yet either.

Understanding what Porol was trying to say, Homura looked at his own appearance and bent his head.

“.....So this getup is inappropriate after all?”

“Exactly. Just try seeing Queen in that state and she’ll massacre your whole lineage.”

“S-She’s someone that dangerous?”

“There’s also that, but normally thinking, that’s not an appearance you should have when seeing a floor master. —Carol, prepare a uniform immediately. His size shouldn’t be that much different from mine.”

“U-Understood!”

She gave a bow while flicking her hooked tail again.

Porol turned towards Homura.

“Homura, follow me. Fix your appearance after taking a bath. Do it fast if you don’t want to die.”

“I’m shedding tears from gratitude. Is the bath inside the Great Tree?”

“Yeah. It’s near the VIP rooms, so it’s not that far. Hurry up, there’s no time.”

Homura bent his neck in slight wonder while looking at Porol who repeated that there was no time so many times.

“She’s the one who asked for the unreasonable. Is it really necessary to fuss over it so much?”

“Are you an idiot, what the hell are you asking! Negotiating with the Queen puts even my life on the line. She is someone who would even fuss about the time. The communities who have earned her dislike getting annihilated the next day is something well known. Besides, the reason that the inside of the Great Tree is safe now is because we presented a tribute to her and she took it under her protection. We have no choice but to abide to her rules, right?”

So that’s how it was, nodded Homura. If there’s no time, then this was also no place to be asking questions. Homura began to prepare at once.

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## —“Underwood” Among the Greenery - Large Public Bath.

After having woken up, Suzuka couldn’t hide her surprise when she found out that the wound on her flank had perfectly healed.

“No way.....I certainly thought that I was a goner. Gifts sure are amazing!”

“Y-Yes.....However, Suzuka. Are you sure everything’s alright?”

“Yeahh, I’m fine, I’m fine! I just thought I might have lost a little too much blood, but that healed up quickly too!”

Suzuka waved her arms around to show that she was healthy at Ayato’s uneasy questioning.

Ayato was still anxious, however she felt relieved that Suzuka was healthy, so that’s all that mattered.

And so, the place they came to was the large public bath of the Great Tree.

Unlike the ones made by simply linking the wooden boards, this large public bath that was made by carving out the trunk of the Great Tree had no joint parts. It looked like a strange optical illusion as if the bath was inside a living organism. The bathroom didn’t have a faucet that supplied hot water to it either, and it was arranged in such a way that it would naturally flow from the water tree’s trunks.

Heading towards such a mysterious bath, Ayazato Suzuka and Kudou Ayato as well as Kuro Usagi and Sharol Gundark, bumped into each other in the bath house as if they had conspired beforehand.

“Ooh! Kuro Usa and.....Nekomimi-san?”

“Nyahaha, name’s Sharol Gundark, miss stranger. Thank you for standing up to the Minotaur some time ago. It’s not something we could handle by ourselves.”

Sharol hung her head down with her Nekomimi dropping down.

Suzuka raised a thumb and smiled.

“It’s fine, it’s fine, we should rely on each other in times of trouble!”

“Nyahaha, thanks for the manly reply. At least let me wash your back once.”

The simpleton girls passionately shook their hands, finding the mutual understanding. Although it's a secret, Suzuka's affinity with stray cats was always good.

Showing a wry smile, Ayato removed her white blouse and touched her underwear. It's nice to clean the body.

*(I don't have good memories of the public baths.....But, well, it shouldn't be a problem with these members.)*

She put large towel around herself and touched the bath door.

But, at that moment—Her breasts were strongly massaged by the demonic hands that suddenly extended from her armpits.

“Hya!”

“Nyahahahahahaha! Good, good, your face is docile, but aren't you releasing quite a charming voice, blond beauty! You have such good objects considering your age, and yet to be hiding them in the large public bath among the greenery is nothing but outlawry conduct! Now an adult, I, Sharol-oneesama, shall teach your body the traditional Underwood culture of *beep beep and beeeep!*”

“That's as far as you go! Dirty things are banned on Aya-chan!”

Suzuka who put a towel on her body, rotated her body in the air and did a spinning teleportation kick on Sharol's skull.

—Incidentally, this kick that required jumping into the sky for a moment, acquiring a falling energy, then adding a rotation to it and kicking the target flying, was a deadly kick with a high lethality ratio that she came up with three seconds prior.

Although Sharol was particularly tough amongst the Beastmen, this kick was still effective, as expected.

She looked up at Suzuka as if glaring at a bitter enemy while she lie collapsed and held her neck.



“You.....Did you betray me, Suzuka!?”

“Too noisy! Before being a friend to you, I am Aya-chan’s Senpai! Didn’t your daddy teach you not do what others dislike, you moron!”

“But my older brother also said that if it feels bad at first but becomes pleasurable later on, then the gain and loss becomes even!”

“You can’t do that!!! Rather than that, what kind of siblings are you, keep away from them everyone!”

Hiss! Suzuka and Sharol had their hair standing on ends. It seems that their friendship lasted short.

While dropping her Usamimi, Kuro Usagi rushed over to Ayato who held her breasts and had her head hanging down.

“A-Are you alright, Ayato-san?”

“.....Y-Yes. It caught me by surprise, but I can handle this much.”

That said, she held her breasts while her cheeks were dyed pink from embarrassment. coupled with the surprise attack, it seems she was startled. That behavior of hers was just like a small animal.

It was unusual for her who carried an air of dignity and calmness to be disturbed to this point.

Suzuka explained the circumstances as she sighed and scratched her head.

“Haa.....Listen, Sharol-san. Aya-chan is sheltered to an amaaaaaazing degree. So much that she didn’t even talk with the kids of the same generation before joining our school.”

“O-Oh wow. And so?”

“Well, it would be fine if it was just that. But, it’s about a sheltered girl who was separated from her birthplace entering the Pandemonium that was inhabited by girls from thirteen to eighteen years old. That’s why, um.....Look, as you can see Aya-chan is a beauty, right? She wasn’t exactly teased, but she was still being jostled. She ran back home in a week.”

Fuuuh, Suzuka released a sigh. In reality, Ayato wasn’t teased. On the contrary,

there was a girl with backbone who gave three-fold retribution to those who used vicious means.

The problem was, the dormitory girls didn't have any bad intentions.

Instead, they warmly welcomed Ayato.

Blond hair that was as beautiful as golden threads. Beautiful eyes of premium color that could be said to be a mix of green and blue.

Unique skin produced by a mix of European and Asian blood. Furthermore, her mother was an outstanding woman who had single-handedly managed the beauty department of Everything Company.

Despite being petite, her standing figure overflowed with elegance, and looked so imposing that made her appear as if she was a standing sword.

While she possessed such high stats, there was hardly anyone who burned with jealousy and was hostile towards her. Rather, the ones who looked at her with innocent envy were far more in number.

"So, that.....L-Look. Girls make groups just for girls right? It makes the girl power drop down rapidly, doesn't it? Things like cleaning the room or scattering the underwear everywhere is are still fine, but the problem is in conversation topics and actions that only happens between girls."

They finally realized at that point.

Although Ayato could be harsh towards the opponents, she didn't have experience to deal with those who were envious of her. So by being overly kind, they took the wrong approach.

As a result, she left the female dormitory as if running away from it.

"Well, I think those girls were entirely at fault. Next were the senior high school guys who treated the innocent first year middle schoolers as playthings. —I still can't turn a blind eye to them even now."

For a moment, a voice, so cold that it made one wonder whether that place froze resounded there. It was no ordinary thing for such a gentle girl to be burning with such cool-headed anger.

Understanding the circumstances, Sharol apologized to Ayato while dropping

her Nekomimi.

“I’m really sorry. I didn’t think you were a girl with such a trauma in the heart. It was just skinship like in my family.....”

“N-No please don’t mind it. That’s how this world is, so the sense of values between the races would naturally differ.”

“Come on, Aya-chan. If you take such an attitude, the other party will become even more impudent, you know? Sometimes you just have to forcefully drive it into their heads!”

“No no, what Suzuka did was on a level where even a beastman was half-killed, you know?”

Sharol painfully rubbed her neck, while Suzuka sniffed at her saying ‘You reap what you sow’.

Kuro Usagi revealed a wry smile while she inclined her head and Usamimi to the side.

*(Kudou Ayato-san.....I wondered whether you were that person or not, however.....She wasn’t someone who would be shaken from something like that.....right?)*

Three years ago——The Female Knight who got reincarnated to the outer world as one of “Queen’s Knights”.

Kuro Usagi thought whether Ayato could be her after seeing her excellent horsemanship and fighting spirit that she displayed at daytime, however her thoughts grew duller after witnessing such a girly appearance of hers.

However, if one thought about it carefully, even if she was the same person, Kuro Usagi was still unrelated to it. Because that “Queen’s Knight” should have had all the memories of her soul erased at the time of reincarnation.

*(Let’s just forget about this matter. I’ll cause the other person to harbor suspicion.)*

Shaking her Usamimi slightly on the side, Kuro Usagi put away the memory of this matter in the corner of her mind.

After the four of them reconciled, they decided to enjoy the Great Tree

bathhouse together.

# Chapter 9

The branches of the Great Tree shook slightly from the wind that was blowing wildly.

The storm raging outside didn't show any signs of calming down. Even so, the reason why the Bull monster didn't attack yet, was thanks to the existence of the absolute power holder who protected this Great Tree.

Homura walked along the hidden passageways in the waterway that was under the Aquatic City.

He was told that if he advanced straight ahead in this cave, he would reach the other side of the great waterfall that flowed out from the precipitous cliff. And after opening the door beside it, he would arrive at the audience room.

After walking down the drawn out road for about ten minutes, Homura finally arrived at that place. However, even though he heard that it was inside the Great Tree, it was just cheating how it was under the roots..

“.....I'm three minutes late, huh? The setting sun has already started to turn red.”

He touched the door while giving a quick remark. But this was still a better outcome. Even though there was no time, Porol and others prepared him well enough. There was no way he could blame it on their skills.

“Do not disobey her if you want to return alive.”, although Porol had said so, if he couldn't return to his former world, coming here would be all for naught. For the time being, meeting her took top priority.

Homura pushed the luxurious door. The moment that door which glowed conspicuously within the dimness opened, his view was wrapped within a light similar to that of the sun.

“.....Huh.”

Homura doubted his eyes as he was bathed in the dazzling light. That was by

no means a metaphor. Because that cave door, was connected to a place quite different from “Underwood”.

Exposed to the brilliant sunlight, he looked up at the sky.

At that point, he came to a realization that this place was within a castle covered by a thin canopy.

The place he was brought to, was the courtyard of a castle with white walls, with the canopy opened widely on it.

On all sides were neatly divided flower beds consisting of flowers of all seasons. The marble paving leading to the centre, was refined so beautifully that it made one consider that it was too good to step down on it.

Ignoring some irrational things there, one would be honestly intoxicated by such beautiful modeling.

However, Saigou Homura was a little different. It's not as if his youthful spirit was lost or anything, but in this camouflaged garden, his sense of caution came out superior.

To speak figuratively, this whole garden itself was like a giant mousetrap.

Or it might be better to call it a Golden Devil's den. If he strayed from the path just by a step out of sheer curiosity, he would momentarily be preyed upon by the monsters.....He was overcome with such a fear.

“\_\_\_\_\_”

Stepping carefully, he set his foot on the marble paving. Thereupon, the colors of flower petals underwent a complete change.

Perhaps this was arranged in order to surprise the visitors of the garden, however it instead cleared Homura's head.

If they had planned to set a trap here, then something would've probably activated and appeared with the very first step. However, the only thing changing were the colors of the petals, or perhaps the seasons simply shifted by one block.

It was indeed beautiful, but nothing more.

That's why, the owner of this courtyard certainly had no intention to harm the trespasser.

Homura guessed that it was simply set up in order to surprise the trespassers and nothing more.

However, while that may be true, making a mistake of straying from the path was still a no go. As he walked straight ahead on the paving, he arrived at the center of the courtyard that was covered with a veil.

Seasons rotating one by one by each step was indeed beautiful, but there was no danger. Were it not the current circumstances, he would have obediently enjoyed it as a wonderful scenery without a doubt.

As he touched the silk veil of a fine quality, Homura vigorously pushed it aside.

As he did so, the door opened.

Ahead of the delicate wooden door, was a warm fireplace, a bed for a bedroom, and a circular table with a tea set for inviting guests.

It was probably because of a raging storm approaching that the window was giving off creaking sounds. In other words, this room was one of the rooms somewhere in “Underwood”.

As he got surprised and turned around—the place that was once the entrance had now become a simple wall.

“Kh.....”

Finally after coming here, he got goosebumps all over. Then he realized something he hadn't known.

Homura was inspecting “where” the trap was.

However, “this place” was already a trap. As their statuses were far too different, Homura realized that he misjudged her way of thinking by as many as six dimensions.

The Queen who controls the world boundaries, “Queen Halloween”.

—He did certainly hear something like that.

However, hearing it and actually experiencing it were two completely different things. Suzuka's Apport & Asport seemed like a child's play in comparison. This person, however, controlled the world boundaries as easily as turning a page of a picture book. If she had this much power, she might as well be thinking of the whole world as her garden.

Before him were two doors. It appeared that the audience room was still up ahead.

*(The blue and red doors.....Which of them is correct.....!!?)*

His heartbeat had become faster before he noticed. It also was apparent that his breathing was becoming rougher. He was assaulted by the misapprehension that he would possibly be made to go on a search for an exit after appearing in a strange land every time he opened the door from now on.

It appears she got quite angry because of him being late. However, even if that were the case, forcing a game on him without giving any hints was quite unreasonable.

Wondering whether there was a hint for solving it, he looked around in the fireplace room, and turned his gaze towards the antique clock nearby.

It goes without saying, but the agreed time was already passed by far. It might also be her way of declaring that she had no intention to meet with a rude fellow who couldn't afford showing up on time for the audience.

*(.....? No, wait. This antique clock looks strange.)*

He approached the antique clock while holding down his rapidly beating heart with his right hand. Just as he thought, the clock wasn't counting time. Moreover, the time hand was just three minutes past twelve o'clock.

It was exactly as long as Homura was late.

*(—.....Kh, Namo Amitabha.....!)*

Saigou Homura trusted his intuitive insight, and turned back the time of the antique clock little by little.

One minute, two minutes, three minutes back—

As he did so, it gave a clicking sound.

“—Welcome, Saigou Homura.”

An indication of a person suddenly appeared on the table behind. As Homura pinned down his heart that was about to jump out, he trembled even more than before and vigorously turned around.

The one sitting there—was undoubtedly an incarnation of the sun.

Dazzling golden hair that reminded one of the sun. Although they were simply flowing down, they were spread out so tenderly that it looked like the grain heads that swayed to the bright golden wind. Her eyes, shining just like jewels made from a mix of pure water blue and forest green colors, were looking directly at Homura.

Despite being an outsider, Homura unconsciously understood it.

——This young lady before his eyes was not a Divine Spirit.

She was definitely not a Divine Spirit born from the faith of mankind.

Homura heard that she was the one deified at the Sun Festival of the Celtic Pantheon, but that was no more than the form humans gave her so that they could perceive her in a material world.

Part of the Little Garden’s third strongest kind, governing the noon and night, life and death, the four seasons, stars and their boundaries.

Celestial Spirit of the Sun “Queen Halloween”.

That Golden Queen, silently gazed at Saigou Homura.

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Homura, stiffened and not moving an inch, silently glared at Queen. The saying 'A frog under a snake's glare' would fit this situation.. Before this young, yet beautiful Queen, even War Gods would be overpowered.

Homura stood still without being able to do anything.

As if she couldn't bear to watch that——The Golden Queen gently waved her golden hair, and touched Homura's cheek.

"..... I'm not going to harm you."

"!?"

She wrapped Homura's cheeks with both hands. Homura tensed up from her sudden actions.

Lovely eyes looked into Homura from below.

Then, She——The girl referred to as the Queen, slightly bend her head and told him.

"It's alright now. Now take a slow and deep breath, and fix your breathing."

".....Haa."

"Your heartbeat. It has calmed down a bit, right?"

The golden girl turned around and stepped away from him in a rondo.

Homura grasped his right hand that was on his chest. He felt his heartbeat was still somewhat fast, but it slowly returned to the normal rate.

His respiration that was on the verge of overbreathing wasn't so rough now either.

As he asked what was going on with his eyes, Queen explained a bit sullenly.

"I indicated to you that "I am harmless". From time to time, people who just have to trouble others like this also come by. If you had candies on you, I would've just ended it with a "Trick or Treat!!" agreement."

".....So that's how it was. Thank you for your consideration, Your Majesty."

"Stop it with such formal speech. I wish you at least called me just Queen."

Queen sharpened her lovely lips. As she did that, she looked just like a normal

girl in her teens. It appeared that along with her indication, she also eased her power.

Breathing a long sigh, Homura raised his face and introduced himself.

“Once again, nice to meet you. I’m Saigou Homura. I’m sorry for being late, Queen.”

“Indeed. Including you, there are just three people who have broken the agreed time with me and are still living. I’d like you to be careful next time. —Now, go ahead. I permit you to sit with me.”

She said something surprisingly horrifying. To her, this was probably quite a considerate way of speaking, however to Homura who met her for the first time, it sounded as nothing but an act of showing force.

Homura still hadn’t let down his guard, however he was offered a seat so he settled down for now. Even though he wanted to start the conversation, the earlier experience was still stuck to his body and wouldn’t go away.

Both of them sat and silently stared at each other for a short while. He wondered whether time would pass like this, however surprisingly, it was the Queen’s side who unexpectedly started talking.

“.....Would it be better if I talked perhaps?”

“Yes, well. To say it frankly, I don’t understand what in the world is happening right now. I would like if you explained everything from the start, if possible.”

“I see. Then let us make it a question format. I don’t know how much you want to know after all. —Also, honorifics aren’t necessary. I hate formality.”

“.....Understood. Then I’ll do just that.”

While he replied, Homura felt a bit confused.

He could certainly feel the lack of leniency.

The words from before weren’t a threat either, but simply the words of advice. She was a monster who would cut down a person who came for an audience just because she couldn’t stomach something.

By all rights, Homura’s life was also in danger. Although it wasn’t much, it was

unexpected that he would get away with just that level of retribution.

As if choosing his words carefully, Homura started with the most important question.

“Then, I’ll do as you ask, so the first question—it’s about the current Gift Game. If we clear the Game, would we be able to return to our former world?”

That question appeared to be unexpected.

Queen’s beautiful and lovely eyes became round, being surprised with the question.

“That’s obvious. Just like vampires from last time, you have a special participation limit. It would be possible to return once the Game is finished..... No, it would be troubling if you didn’t return when the Game was over.”

“I-Is that so.....!”

From the unexpected reply, Homura stroked his chest out of relief.

Just now, rather than “You would be returned” the Queen said “It would be troubling if you weren’t returned”. In other words, by whatever means, she meant she was going to cooperate to return him to his former world.

With just this single fact clarified, Homura’s mental pressure changed in one go.

Homura drank the water that was on top of the table in one go, and started to sort the questions he had so far in one go.

“Okay.....Then, next question. About the War Gods of this world of Little Garden, it would be fine to think of them to be the same as the gods from our world, right?”

“Yes. You have already met a few of them, haven’t you? While they aren’t exactly the same, it would be fine if you just think of them to be almost the same beings.”

“Then, are there interchanging relations of some sort between this Little Garden and our world?”

Homura had a question about this since the beginning.

Although this Little Garden was another world with strange laws of physics, only the mythological system spread the same things as in Homura's world across it.

"Moon Rabbit" from Buddhist Tales.

"Shirayuki-hime" from "Yasha-Ga-Ike".

"Halloween" which was the festival of Celtic Mythology.

Homura thought that the reason why the mythological systems of different civilizations could coexist in the same world, could be because the mythology from Homura's world was used as the original and was reproduced like a manuscript.

Even Queen avoided a quick answer to this and pondered for a while.

".....Let's see. There is indeed a deep connection. Might I hear your thoughts about it beforehand?"

Nodding, he retrieved the written invitation from the phone's email box.

## 『 – The Second Sun Authority War Invitation –

Dear Saigou Homura-sama.

**You have earned qualifications to participate in the "Second Sun Authority War" being held in the world of Little Garden. For gaining the qualifications to enter the final selection, please enslave at least one Celestial Beast belonging to the "Twelve Ecliptic Constellations" or "Twelve Chén of the Equator" first.**

**Celestial Beasts required to subjugate: "Taurus"**

**Winning Condition: ① Subjugation of Avatar of "Taurus".**

**Winning Condition: ② Erase the lightning, and return the star to its original**

form.

### ※ Rule Summary/Duration Period

**Due to this being a preliminary game, the duration period would be seven years. After seven years, you would automatically be disqualified from game. No matter who subjugates the beast, it will be counted to Saigou Homura, so please, feel free to cooperate.**

### ※ Important Points ※

**This frame of participation is a special frame that was prepared so that Saigou Homura could participate in the Second Sun Authority War. If you abstain/abandon/ignore the participation or are eliminated in the preliminary round, the special participation frame as well as the inherent Gift “Proto Idea” that Saigou Homura-sama possesses would be collected, so please forgive us.**

**Furthermore, during the game period, you cannot leave the Little Garden so please be careful. Prolonging the game can be considered but please try to complete the requirements within the given time.**

**Yours Sincerely,**

**Second Sun Authority War Facilitators “Laplace Demons”.』**

“When I read this invitation, there was one thing that bothered me the most since the beginning. And it was about why I was chosen as a special participant. At first I thought I was chosen because of the latest Nanomachine device that I

made, however that seems to be a bit lacking of a reason to be invited to the so called greatest Gift Game.”

“I see. Continue.”

“At that point, I pondered a bit. The current Typhoon #link24 damage exceeded two million homes, and the damage to the agriculture is likewise large. The most dangerous infection was the infection spreading in the crops rather than the one spread through human contact. Naturally when that happens, it’s likely that a lot of dead people from the infection would appear due to the damage and famine caused by the disease. Wheat, flour and corn prices started to skyrocket already. If things go bad, there’s also a possibility of war breaking out.”

“That’s right. Humans are indeed beings that can’t survive with sweets alone. —And so?”

Queen urged him to continue in a monotonous voice. Those eyes of hers appeared as if they saw through everything and were a bit frightening. But Homura couldn’t falter here. He stared back into her eyes and held a deep breath.

“Then, if, for argument’s sake, the rule “continuing for seven years” also applied to the blight and famine.....then wouldn’t the person who made a cure for them gain achievement equal to saving the world?”

“Yes. That’s how it would be. But don’t misunderstand. This isn’t a genuine legend. The legend was simply modernized. It reproduces the things of the past with the Spiritual Status of the present. The root of the problem doesn’t lay there.”

Homura became puzzled from Queen’s words.

As expected, he didn’t understand her current words in any way.

“The modernization of a legend? What does that mean?”

“..... Before I explain that, it seems another guest had arrived.”

Suddenly, the Queen traced a horizontal line with her finger in the sky. The moment she did so, Homura’s phone started to ring.

Homura took out the phone that gave out a simple PIPIPI tone. The caller's name wasn't displayed. To even be able to connect the electromagnetic waves that weren't supposed to connect, more and more, Homura couldn't allow himself to be careless around her.

Despite his apparent suspicious frown, he still faithfully answered the phone.

As he did so, an unexpected person's voice was heard.

『.....Yo. It's been a while, Homura.』

\*

—Katsushika, Shibamata Taishakuten - Main Temple.

Izayoi and the two quickly and soundlessly sneaked into its grounds.

There were quite a bit of guards, but with their skill, they safely reached the courtyard. Mikado Tokuteru who snuck inside the main temple, touched the divine seal that was hidden in the floorboard. The moment he did that, the inside of the temple was covered in a pale light.

Mikado Tokuteru, as if catching his breath, breathed a deep sigh.

"I didn't open a gate like "Touriten", however this much should be fine for holding a simple conversation. I'll get in touch with Queen's close associate, so wait a bit."

"Gotcha."

Izayoi sat cross-legged inside of the temple.

It was his first time entering the main temple of Shibamata Taishakuten. He tried checking the surroundings in hopes of finding something novel. On a whim, Izayoi mentally compared the real Indra who was there with the Buddhist statue of his.

(.....*No resemblance at all.*)

Mikado Tokuteru was in his middle 30's, however he was still young nevertheless. Just by judging his appearance, he appeared to be no more than in his twenties. Compared to other Buddhist Deities, even to the statue of Buddha, Indra was made to look quite young. Perhaps that was the cause of it.

In the first place, he—The “War God” Indra, was a high ranking Divine Spirit, incomparable to other Divine Spirits around. There were many gods of military arts around, however if you had to speak of the strongest and the most famous of them all, out of a thousand people, all thousand of them would probably call out the name of Indra.

Thunder God, War god, Heroic God, The King of the Gods. His titles knew no end.

It is said that in “Rig Veda”, the oldest scriptures of India, three-tenths of the text was full with his glorification. Afterwards, there were many who knew him as one of the deities under Buddhism, however he was one of the strongest of the gods, his Spiritual Status rivaling the likes of the chief god of Greece or monotheist gods.

And because such a Great God, who needed three “Supers” as a prefix, was now holding a phone in one hand and talking in the Human World, the world was truly at its end.

“Hey, Izayoi.”

“Hm? What’s up?”

“I connected to Queen, but it seems Homura’s with her too. It’ll be troubling if I get found out so you take it.”

Hah? Izayoi raised a wild voice.

Tokuteru threw the phone without giving him any time. Nonetheless, he didn’t consider that he would be talking with Homura at this time. Because he thought it would be better to say a light good bye to him after this matter was settled.

(.....Well, it’s not something to get so worked up on.)

Izayoi put the phone to his ear and greeted him the usual way.

“Yo. It’s been a while, Homura.”

Bi-doop.

Beep, beep, beep.

With that sound, the call ended.

“.....Hou?”

Izayoi glared at the phone for thirty seconds. Izayoi, being good with smartphones, quickly redialed.

As he did so, a voice quite difficult to describe with words came from the other side.

『.....It’s been a while, Iza-nii.』

“It hasn’t been so long to exactly call it a while, though.”

『Now listen here, don’t ignore that I purposely avoided retorting on it.』

“So noisy. I’m not obliged to give such kindness to a shitty brat who hangs up the phone one-sidedly. Weren’t you a bit more obedient in the old days?”

『Yeah, yeah, I also remember that fact. From my nine-year-old self’s memories, the only things I remember would be like playing with Canaria Sensei or chasing your back along with Suzuka.』

“Good grief. You had a boring atmosphere around you back in those days, but looking at you growing up into such a sourpuss, I feel like I miss that obedient self of yours from then.”

Izayoi told him in teasing manner.

Homura, on the other hand, as if his strings of everyday tension were cut after talking with Izayoi, gripped the phone to the point of creaking.

『Hah!.....You dare say that, huh. Unlike you, I didn’t become rebellious

because I wanted to be one. Besides, it was because that old man Ushimatsu died so suddenly. Thanks to that, my life was bought by the Ojousama of Everything Company, and a good-for-nothing guy called Mikado Tokuteru hid from the debt collectors whenever he failed the job, and I had to pay his debts. So it was one misfortune after another, you know!』

“.....Hohou?”

Izayoi only raised an eyebrow and looked at Mikado Tokuteru. Seeming to have heard the conversation, he quickly averted his eyes and gazed afar.

However, despite spitting out that much, Homura still didn't stop talking and gushed it out like a broken dam.

『I was wondering where you were wandering during these five years, Hah! I didn't think that you actually went to discover another world, but rather than being surprised, I accepted it since it was too much like your style. Still, what is this? Accompanied by a loli with usamimi and a huge-breasted white snakesama, you devoted yourself to the development of an Aquatic City, I hear? I'm not in the least displeased about the fact that you abandoned us and left, but to be playing around in this amusing and strange world all by yourself without concern, I'm not jealous at all you hear, you bastard.....!!!』

“.....”

『—And, what else? What else did you do during these five years?』

“Things like going on a journey with a Gryphon and Demon Lord extermination.”

『Shiiiit! I'm jealous, goddamnit!!!』

UGAAH!!! Homura was in a fit of rampage.

On the contrary—Izayoi was slightly impressed.

Just like Sakamaki Izayoi said just now, Saigou Homura used to be a reserved youth who did nothing but stick to Izayoi's back all the time. It was truly surprising to think that a boy like that grew up into someone who became a pillar of support for the orphanage and covered for a good-for-nothing useless god.

Even though they say “A man changes with the times”, he seems to have grown into quite a great youth in this five year’s time.

As he was absorbed into thinking about such things, Queen’s voice was heard from the other side.

『Homura. Izayoi. I’m going to get to the topic, so make sure that everyone’s voices can be heard.

『Hm? Ah, got it.』

Homura nodded and switched the phone to speaker.

Queen appeared to be slightly doubtful and addressed Izayoi.

『.....Izayoi. Can you hear?』

“Yeah I can hear you Queen. It’s been three days. Even though this is another world, the reception’s decent.”

『I see. That’s good. I will talk about the beginning of this matter, so listen well.』

She indifferently announced so in monotonous voice devoid of any special emotions.

Then, for the first time, she changed her posture and crossed her legs.

『First, I’ll clear up your misunderstanding. From the start, the current matter wasn’t related to Little Garden.』

“What do you mean?”

As the two asked at the same time, Queen, for the first time, sharpened her red lips sullenly and revealed a slight annoyance. It appeared that Queen disliked people who were bad at guessing.

『Exactly as I said. From start to end, this matter at hand was never related to Little Garden. Everything that has happened; the Typhoon that crossed the Equator, the disease damage, famine, everything was expected because they were bound to happen within history.』

“.....Huh.”

“Huuh!!?”

Izayoi became dumbfounded, while Homura raised a disarrayed voice without understanding the meaning.

Queen strongly glared at him as she twitched her eyebrows, seemingly from his loud voice.

『.....Be quiet. Even your surprise lacks refinement.』

“But look, that’s not possible! No well, even though I’m reluctant to do so, disease damage and famine could still be ignored. But Typhoon #link24 crossed the Equator, you know? That’s absolutely impossible to occur in the natural world!”

『That’s true. But you already have an answer for that, don’t you? Few days ago, what was it you talked about with Mikado Tokuteru?』

“.....With Tokuteru?”

Queen looked at Homura as if seeing though everything.

For a moment, he didn’t get what was she talking about, however Homura accepted Queen’s words and explained his conversation from few days back.

—『*In simple terms, there exists a natural rotation power or the so called Coriolis force – the force that moves the vortex. That works on Northern and Southern Hemispheres on a complete opposite directions, things like sea generated typhoon always have a fixed rotation direction. As a result, the typhoon does not occur on the Equator where there is no Coriolis force in the first place, and for a typhoon to pass through it is completely impossible.*』

『.....Hou? So in other words, the power source is something other than Nature, huh?』

『*Even though it sounds unimaginable, it’s not impossible... to begin with, ever since the breakout, this typhoon’s been full of mysteries. Typhoons of Southern Hemisphere always have right rotation direction. But the breakout we are facing, Typhoon number 24 “Taurus” is rotating on the left. It’s suspected that its origin is truly a power completely different from nature.*』

『.....The development of climate weapons are internationally banned. Did anyone break it?』

『It's possible. On the internet, people are saying a certain country was experimenting with climate weapons... Personally, I thought the idea was good. The extent of its durability and the damage it caused, also the power that exceeds laws of natural world somehow feels like it has a will of its own. It looks man-made, or maybe... some kind of supernatural existence is involved.』——

“——. Queen, what are you talking about?”

『Exactly as I said. At the very least, the Avatar of Taurus was the only being that went to the outer world from Little Garden. To begin with, the day it was summoned doesn't add up. Shouldn't you know that the best, Sakamaki Izayoi?』

Queen directed a slightly condemning voice towards him.

Izayoi was lost for words, while Homura widened his eyes.

『.....Iza-nii? What's the matter?』

“It's too much to even say. I was summoned just three days ago. I was sure there was a gap in time with Little Garden..... but it wasn't exactly so, was it?”

『That's right. Regarding the speed of time flow, it has been synchronized since two years ago. Influenced by “Twelve Guardian Devas”, it is in the dependent state with a certain world time.』

“Is that so. This confirms it.”

Izayoi breathed a long sigh.

It felt too heavy considering it was Izayoi, and had somewhat painful emotions loaded into it.

“.....So that's it. So the “Bull of Heaven” was also a legend of a Middle East country, huh. I completely forgot about that.”

『Huh?』

“It’s nothing. anyway, I understood the roots to its origin, Homura. The study you are doing together with Everything Company.....Isn’t it related to the third perpetual motion?”

Homura reflexively thought whether his heart popped out from his chest. Because that information wasn’t something which Izayoi, who went to another world known as Little Garden should have known.

Despite knowing it was meaningless, Homura reflexively lowered his voice.

『.....Wait. Where did you hear about that. What I’m researching should only be known publicly as the Nanomachine technology called Third Type Star Particle Body. I haven’t told anyone about the perpetual motion or energy revolution that used the Maxwell Drive.』

“Right, it was Maxwell who was the source of that. In this Little Garden, I have fought with “Maxwell’s Demon” who became the subject for that.”

『.....Wha-』

“I’ll leave out the details, but that guy was a demon who manipulated the boundaries of “Heat” and “Cold”. If the Star Particle Body has the same power as “Maxwell’s Demon”, there might be ways to control the atmospheric temperature changes and manipulate atmospheric pressure.”

Aside from Saigou Homura—There shouldn’t exist anyone who researched Star Particle Bodies. The reason is that it was the fruit of the research Homura’s father left behind. The result of it were the true Star Particle Bodies - nicknamed “Origin”, only three samples of which existed. There wouldn’t be any research possible if they didn’t exist.

In the first place, after finally disassembling that super technology by using his Gift, he had no idea how to create them from scratch. There’s no way to reproduce such monstrosity that could cause a medical revolution just by reproducing 10% of it, as long as there’s not even a blueprint of it—

『.....Thesis.』

“Thesis? Whose?”

『Father’s thesis. If that was available, then even if there were no Star Particle

Bodies, the research could still progress.....But,』

Saigou Homura's father was dead. That was definite.

And his thesis is supposed to have been lost at that time.

Since no one from scientific society has announced anything about it until now, it was presumed to be simply lost—But if there were people who have been researching it secretly for years...

『That's right, Saigou Homura. Someone who got hold of your father's thesis has reproduced the "Bull of Heaven" on earth. That someone is the main culprit of this Gift Game that dragged the outer world in it.....Now then. I wonder what that means?』

\*

Beep—

At that moment, Saigou Homura hung the call. He himself was surprised from that reflexive action. As he gazed at the phone while unable to understand the reason for those actions—Queen drew close enough that her fragrance wafted into his nose and looked at his face.

“.....!?”

From that defenseless action of hers, Homura instinctively bent back.

He understood it well that this girl was similar to a monster, however it didn't change the fact that she was a beauty. It was only natural that his heart skipped a bit.

“.....Queen.”

“What is it~?”

Here for the first time—the Queen of the Sun, revealed a true smile of enjoyment that came from the bottom of her heart.

Her rose-like red lips opened beautifully as if a flower was split, and her eyes like jewels, were simultaneously looking at both of them who were worlds apart. Surely enough, she was now estimating how these two boys would act.

The storm outside of the window grew even stronger, and the flame of the fireplace shrunk as if it was about to freeze. It shook so much that it seems like the place would be blown off if the wind blew any stronger.

And yet, Homura's eyes lit up a flame filled with various emotions, and carried such heat in them that it seemed as if they would flare up any moment now. At this moment, he, for the first time in his life, had both his soul and body burning with hostility.

"There are some things I want to confirm."

"Alright. If it's now, I'd answer anything you want."

She directed a beautiful smile similar to the sun towards Homura.

Homura asked her while suppressing his emotions.

".....Was it a human from Little Garden that summoned the Celestial Beast to the outer world?"

"Yes. Although I can't comment whether they were human or not."

"—Did that person from Little Garden study the Star Particle Bodies?"

"No. The former and latter seem the same but are different. However, they are cooperating."

"—.....In that case, in what aspect are they cooperating?"

"Of course, that's your father's.....fufu, that would also be a secret. With the way you are asking me, I won't answer."

Separating from Homura, Queen put her elbow on the tableside, and tickled Homura's heart with a sugary voice. By any means, she wanted to hear that one word from his mouth. She wanted to make him realize that.

For the orphanage, for family, for friends——If he, who devoted his life to others, were to start to fight for his own emotions...

That would surely be the start of an enjoyable revenge tragedy, fierce and

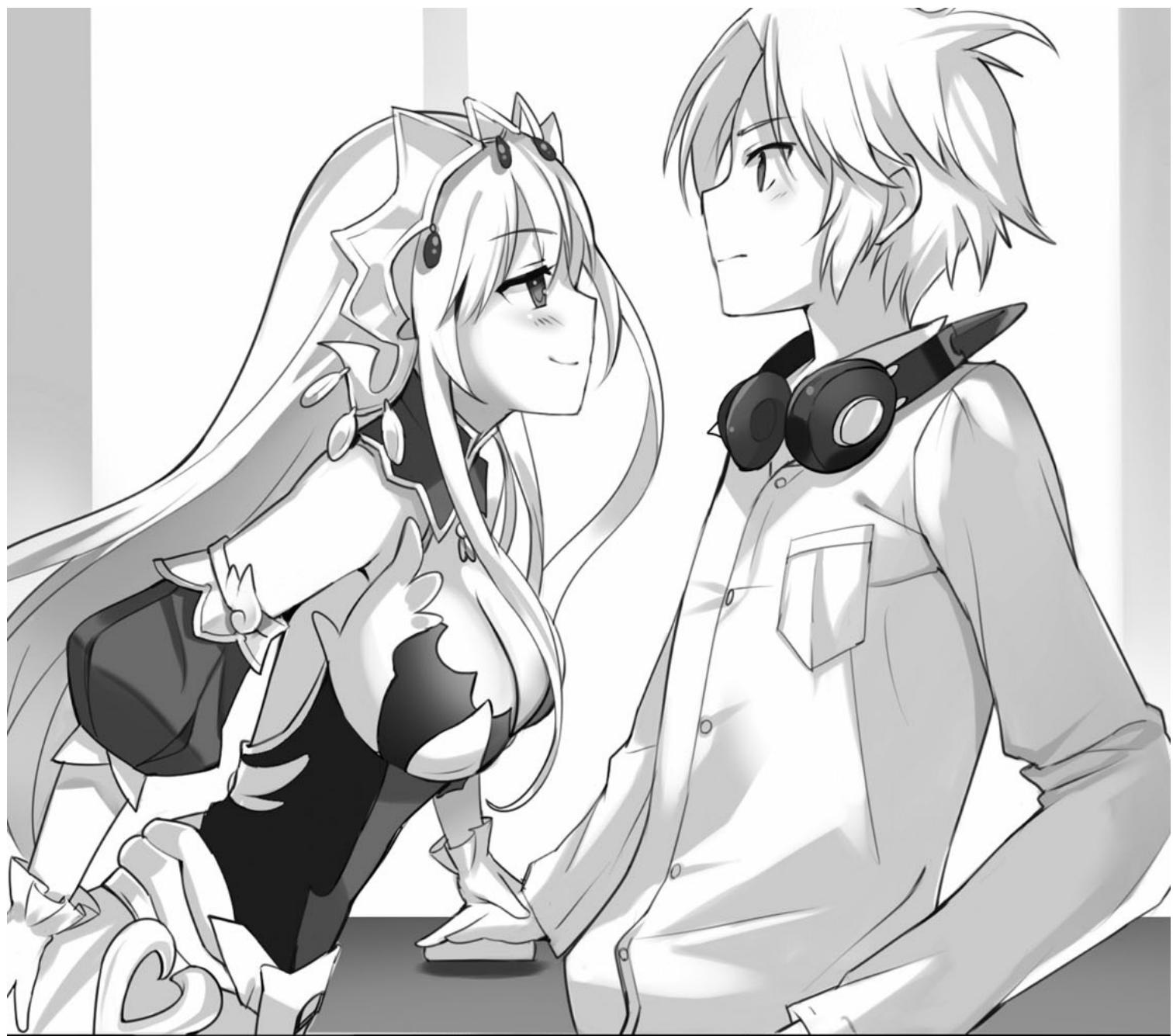
passionate like burning flames.

“\_\_\_\_\_”

While Homura was aware of Queen's playful mood,

And while he guessed the answer,

He spun her words just like a dance.



\*

—Sakamaki threw down the phone that didn't connect no matter how many times he called back.

“.....She's gone and done it now, that rotten, shitty Queen.”

The phone that was thrown with all his fury, was cruelly smashed to pieces.

He didn't exactly start raging out loud, but it's been three years since he exploded with this much anger. It was fortunate that the target of his outburst of rage was the phone and not the temple.

Mikado Tokuteru who listened carefully, looked up at the sky while feeling relief that his domain wasn't destroyed and suppressed the anger for his smashed up phone.

“She got us.....that Queen fellow, she completely shut the boundary. Since it has come to this, It's impossible for us in Japan to connect to Little Garden. With this, the way to return Izayoi to Little Garden has been lost. .....This has turned into a troublesome situation. Do you have any ideas, Prith?”

“It's impossible for me. I'm not acquaintances with anyone who controls the boundaries.”

“I guess. That being the case, we can't return until the Sun Authority War starts. What will you do, Izayoi?”

Tokuteru asked in a half-joking, half-serious manner.

However, unexpectedly, Izayoi gave an immediate reply.

“I have a single idea. We might be able to connect to Little Garden from there.”

“Hou? Is it within this country?”

“No, it's overseas. My partner is waiting there for me. He was pestering me by

saying he wanted to see the temple once, so I left him there. ....So, what will you guys do?"

Izayoi asked the two Divine Spirits while looking back. They were out of options themselves. Since they had nowhere else to go, it wouldn't be bad to keep Izayoi company.

"Sounds good. But we'll use cars and planes when traveling to human habitations."

"I know, I know. I don't have a plan to destroy my home world, after all."

The three of them confirmed each other's intentions, and headed towards the airport.

As Prith opened her phone to request preparing a fake passport for Izayoi, she suddenly asked as if remembering something.

"That reminds me, Sakamaki Izayoi. Are you really unrelated to the current matter? From the feeling I got from that earlier conversation, it appeared that you are acquaintances with Queen."

"I'm unrelated to the matter itself. ....But, you are right. I do know about Minotaur. It was summoned to the outer world when I challenged it in the Game of the Labyrinth."

As Izayoi informed them, the two exchanged glances as if surprised.

".....Oi. I didn't hear about that."

"Because I didn't think it was necessary to tell you. ....However, since it has become such a serious matter, talking with you about it seems better. I'll explain while we travel."

Izayoi who got into Tokuteru's beloved car, talked about the start of this matter with them.

Everything started one week ago—Following the Gift Game from Greek Mythological legend.

“Minotaur the Throne in Labyrinth”.

Izayoi started to talk about the single monster and the game of gods and demons that he experienced there.



# Afterwords

*Alright! Let's become a novelist!*

It was four years ago when I got that idea and debuted.

Everyone who is here for the first time, nice to meet you. As for those of you who have been following since the previous series, it's been a while. It's me, Tatsunoko Tarou and I didn't expect that I would continue like this.

On this occasion, I'd like to thank you for taking up this second part of the modern comedy and heartwarming fantasy, "Last Embryo" in hands. It's been full of big talks from the very first volume, but it makes me happy that you didn't shake it off and followed it. Like until now, I want to keep going nonstop full throttle and do this and that with double protagonists, so it would make me happy if we enjoyed the world of Little Garden together.

Now then, since this is a rare occasion, I will briefly touch on the contents of the book.

This time, rather than volume one and two.....It would become a Question and Answer arc format. Well, this time it also served as an explanation of the world view. It would make me happy if you enjoyed that part.

I thought I'd write about Izayoi and Homura someday, so next time, rather than Games, I'm planning to pack it with drama parts.

Sometimes, I think that rather than scenes that use the brain, I want to write a story full of emotions, background descriptions and battle descriptions. Rather, that's what I usually think about as of late.

.....Eh, I wonder why I am even writing about Games..

By the way, the work-side team composition changed now!

Illustrator Momoco-san, Editor o-san, I look forward to working with you from

now on.

From now starts the double protagonist adventure drama of Izayoi Sakamaki and Saigou Homura.

I would like you to enjoy the Sun Authority War along with it.

Well then, let's meet again in the next volume!

Tatsunoko Tarou



遂に動き始めた太陽の女王  
“クイーン・ハロウィン”！  
焰さん、彩鳥さん、鈴華さんは  
自由奔放に遊び回る彼女に  
振り回されながら“天の牡牛”に  
再挑戦するものの………。

へ？ そんなことより黒ウサギが  
ロリっ子になった理由？  
そ、それは次巻まで  
まだ秘密なのですよ！  
そ、それでは  
次回の『ラストエンブリオ 2』も  
お楽しみくださいなのです！

## **Super Behind The Scenes Next Volume Preview!!**

The Sun Queen, “Queen Halloween” finally started to take action!

While she played around without restraint and toyed freely with them, Homura-san, Ayato-san and Suzuka-san challenged the “Bull of Heaven” once more.....

Eh? Rather than that, the reason why Kuro Usagi became a loli?

T-That has to wait until the next volume...

It's still a secret!

T-Then...

Please enjoy “Last Embryo 2” next time as well!

**COMING SOON**

# Last Embryo V1 Side Story

This is a little bonus side story happening somewhere during the Izayoi, Kuro Usagi and Gry's travels. Anyway, hope you enjoy it and happy Valentine's Day.

Translator: Eclipse9

TLC: Sora

## A quiche Full of Memories, With Kuro Usagi, Gryphon and the Others

—Outside of Little garden outer gate 77777 “Pumpkin forest”.

It was coincidentally the morning of Sakamaki Izayoi, Kuro Usagi and Gryphon's first anniversary since their journey. The reason why they came to this “Pumpkin forest” region which was filled with pumpkin-bearing trees that became a mess, was because they overheard a rumor that someone witnessed a pumpkin monster.

Perhaps that could be the pumpkin clown they were familiar with.

To confirm this suspicion, 2 people plus 1 beast went to “Pumpkin forest”— When they actually arrived however, they discovered a monster that far surpassed their imaginations.

Sakamaki Izayoi, Kuro Usagi and Gry the Gryphon speechlessly raised their heads towards the pumpkin monster, “Hahaha. This really.....is big enough!”

“Howawa.....how, how big can it be?”

“It's even bigger than the hills around here, that's what the rumors claimed. I

think that even the witness felt foolish to measure it.”

That's right—that wasn't a “Pumpkin monster”, but rather “a monstrously huge Pumpkin”.

A ladder was stacked on the neighbouring hill, it looked like they dug out the flesh from the top of the pumpkin for cooking. The reason why they didn't start digging from below was probably because the local community wanted to make it into a landmark. By fully scraping away the inner flesh of the pumpkin and then carving a face outside, it could be considered a perfect pumpkin monster.

The dug-up flesh could also be processed nearby, and sold at the street stalls there.

Kuro Usagi straightened her usagimimi, and swept her gaze across all the street stalls.

“Cold pumpkin soup, Pumpkin omelete, Pumpkin pie, Pumpkin juice.....all of them are made from pumpkin. Is there anything different?”

“Such as usagi nabe?”

“That's right! Before killing a rabbit we first have to cut the ears and drain the blood, hey! What are you doing saying such scary words with spirit! Baka!”

KAPA!!! The paper fan came sweeping down.

Hearing the conversation just now, even Gry could not condone it.

“Izayoi. It was your fault just now. Speaking of rabbit meat, compared to nabe, grilling would taste even better.”

“That's right! The naturally soft meat would become flabby once placed inside a nabe, yeah right, don't say such things! Baka!!!”

KAPA! Kuro Usagi brought down the paper fan on Gry's head. Gry nodded his head after being hit, and reconsidered.

“.....That's how it is huh. Sorry, I was wrong. Rabbit meat should be eaten raw,”

“I've had enough!!!”

Ugaa! Kuro Usagi straightened her usamimis and shouted.

The two of them looked towards the street stalls, not the least bothered by what they had done.

“Well, since we rarely come by here, finding local delicacies is also not a bad thing.”

“Un. I’ll rest under the tree shade while you two stroll around.”

Gry the Gryphon went next to the Pumpkin tree and sat down to rest for a while. If he went with them, it would be either his menacing appearance scaring away the surrounding people, or running around naked after using his Therianthropy Technique, only these two options. Thus this was his decision after pondering about it.

Izayoi and Kuro Usagi strolled around the street stalls selling pumpkin products.

“Oh right, speaking about pumpkin, I remembered something! In the past, Izayoi-san once baked pumpkin Quiche. does that mean that it’s your specialty?”

“Rather than saying that it’s my specialty, it should be my favourite dish. I’m very strict regarding Quiche because I am acquainted with the world’s number one Quiche chef.”

After laughing, his eyes showed a sense of nostalgia. To Izayoi, that was a rarely seen calm look in his eyes.

Sensing the sudden nostalgic atmosphere around him, Kuro Usagi propped up her usamimis and proposed.

“I see, to Izayoi-san, Quiche is the flavour of home. .....Then why not let Kuro Usagi bake one for Izayoi-san to try next time?”

“Heh? Do you have confidence?”

“YES! Kuro Usagi wants to erase the shame from that fish dish in the past! Let me display my capability, and let Izayoi-san know that I am a rabbit that can take care of household chores!”

Kuro Usagi straightened her usamimis, full of energy. Izayoi happily accepted the challenge.

"Then I'll play along with you. The topic would be Quiche, main ingredient is—r,"

"If you dare to say rabbit, Kuro Usagi won't hesitate to wage war on you, you know?"

After that, Kuro Usagi took out her vajra. Facing an attitude much stronger than the past, Izayoi casually shrugged his shoulders, "Well then, let's use Kuro Usagi's thigh meat,"

"WuWaaaaaa!!!! What are you trying to make me imagine!! You big idiot—!!!"

Kuro Usagi released thunderbolt at the same time as her tsukkomi. The local community was enraged by Kuro Usagi and co for destroying the giant pumpkin that could have become a famous landmark, after being chased for a long period of time, they finally left after stealing a share of pumpkin pie.

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# **Last Embryo - Volume 01**

## **Return of the Problem Child**

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